THE NORTHUMBRIAN SAINTS

S. OSWALD KING & MARTYR A.D. 642
S. AIDAN BISHOP A.D. 651
S. CUTHBERT BISHOP A.D. 687

ELIZABETH GRIERSON

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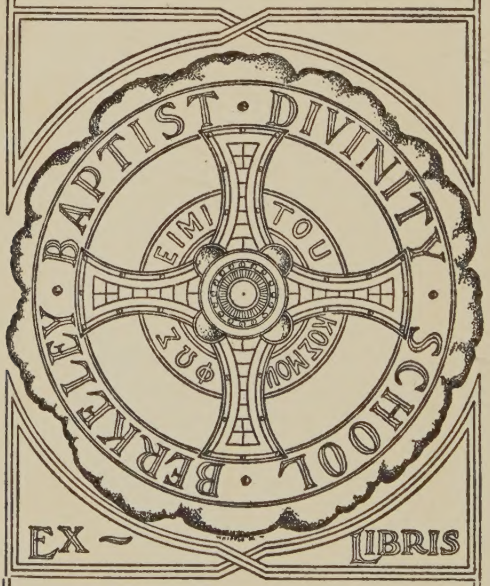

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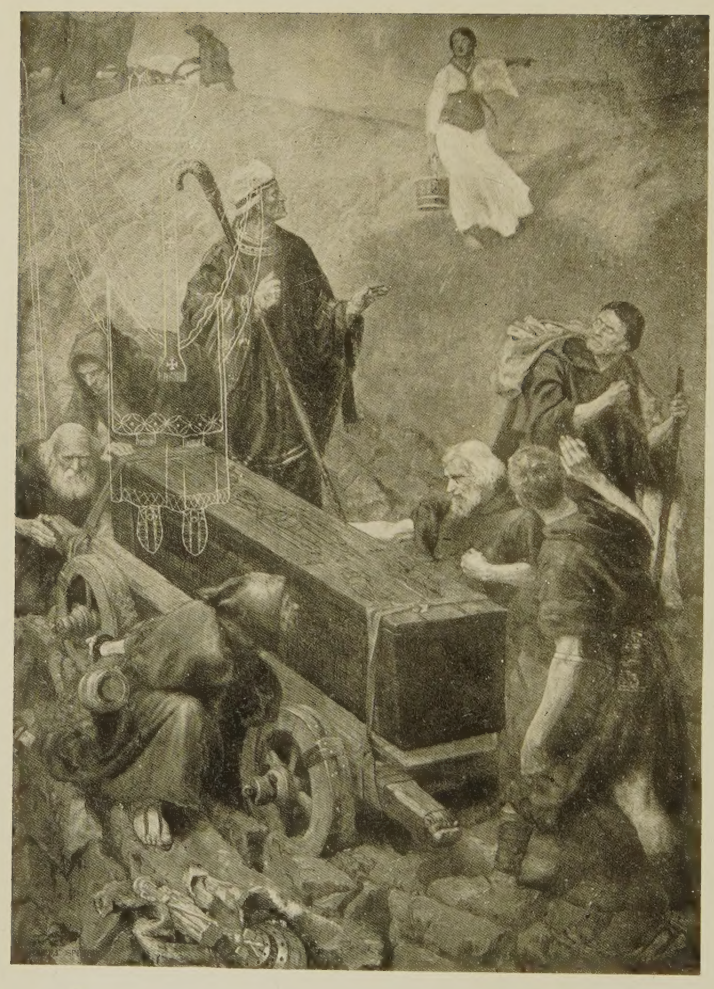


The translation of S. Cuthbert's body to Dunholme.

Photo by Paul Laib, by special permission of the Artist, Mr. Robert Spence.

Frontispiece—Page 126

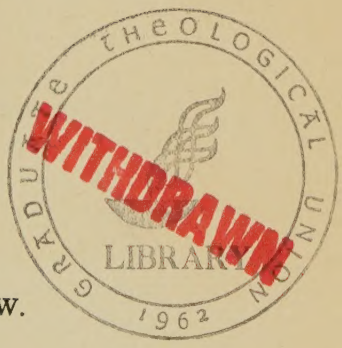
THE STORY OF THE NORTHUMBRIAN SAINTS

S. OSWALD S. AIDAN
S. CUTHBERT

BY

ELIZABETH W. GRIERSON

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS



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PREFACE

THE stories of the Saints are at best but shadowy to us. Long centuries have passed since they lived, and all too often, in this England of ours, every trace of their lives has been swept away, though, happily, the influence of the work which they wrought for CHRIST remains—that can never die.

But in the chapter library at Durham, once the dormitory of the monks, the centuries are bridged over, and we feel nearer these holy men of old when we stand by a case in the centre of the room and look down at two relics of curious form and quaint workmanship, which the hands of S. Cuthbert, Patron Saint of Northumbria, must often have handled as he went about his sacred work of prayer and ministry.

One is his cross, fashioned of gold, set with garnets, which was found among the folds of the silken vestments in which his body had been vested, and which had been suspended round his neck by a silken cord, through which ran a thread of gold; the other, a fragment of the little portable altar which he carried about with him, and on which he celebrated the Holy Communion.

40867

This altar had been laid on his breast by his faithful monks, and is made of a square slip of oak, bound and covered on one side with silver.

Other and scarcely less interesting relics are portions of the vestments in which the remains of the Saint were buried, and parts of the coffin in which they were enclosed and in which they were carried up and down the country for so many years. This is the identical coffin which was fashioned by the monks of Lindisfarne in A.D. 698, eleven years after Cuthbert's death, when they wished to place his body in the shrine which they had prepared for it in their little church.

This coffin, which was falling to pieces, was opened in 1827, in order to make sure that S. Cuthbert's bones, as well as the skull of S. Oswald, and part of the bones of S. Aidan, which had been placed there when the coffin was removed from Lindisfarne, were really within.

This fact having been verified, a new coffin was reverently substituted for it ; and the fragments which we see were taken to the library along with the cross and altar, also an ivory comb, a richly embroidered stole and maniple, a girdle, and bracelets of gold, all of which were found beside the remains of the Saint.

These latter, however, did not belong to S. Cuthbert, but were placed in his coffin as offerings many years after his death.

The stole, maniple, girdle, and bracelets were gifts from King Athelstan, grandson of Alfred the Great,

who visited Durham on his way to Scotland in A.D. 938.

We can also stand in Durham Cathedral beside the grave of the Venerable Bede, and we are glad that it is so, for it seems fitting that the dust of this old Anglo-Saxon chronicler should rest under the same roof as that of the three Saints, the story of whose lives was written by his pen, and is now retold in the following pages.

And over all the building seems still to linger the "Peace of S. Cuthbert," which many a poor terror-stricken wretch, fleeing from justice, gladly claimed; for some words which the dying Saint spoke came true, and his last resting-place had the right of Sanctuary. For, if any sorely-pressed fugitive could only win the northern door of the cathedral and grasp the ring of the quaint, grotesque knocker that is still fastened there, he was safe from his pursuers, even although they were close at his heels; and was received into the sacred precincts by the monks, and fed and clothed until such time as his pardon was obtained, or he could be safely sent over the sea.

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"Lift up your heads, ye gates of brass ;
Ye bars of iron, yield ;
And let the King of Glory pass ;
The Cross is in the field.

That banner, brighter than the star
That leads the train of night,
Shines on the march, and guides from far
His servants to the fight.

Ye armies of the living God,
Sworn warriors of Christ's host,
Where hallowed footsteps never trod,
Take your appointed post."

S. OSWALD

S. OSWALD

CHAPTER I

A YOUTHFUL FUGITIVE

JUST thirteen hundred years ago, when England and Scotland were not one undivided realm as they are to-day, but were divided up into several small kingdoms—when the Picts and Scots inhabited the north of Scotland, and the ancient British or Celtic races the territories of Strathclyde, Wales, and Cornwall; when the Angles held sway in the east of England, and the Saxons in the south; while the Jutes ruled Kent and the Isle of Wight—there reigned in the northern part of the territory of the Angles a king named Ethelfrid.

His dominion extended from the river Humber to the Firth of Forth, and was known as Northumbria.

Ethelfrid was a heathen, for at the time in which he lived no missionary, as far as we know, had ever penetrated into his dominions, but he was a good and wise monarch, and great was the sorrow of his subjects when, in A.D. 617, he was killed in battle, while fighting against the King of the East Angles, whose name was Raedwald.

Now the cause of this battle was that Ethelfrid had a brother-in-law named Edwin, who held that he had a better claim to the throne of Northumbria than Ethelfrid had; and he had enlisted Raedwald's sympathy on his behalf, and Raedwald fought for him.

So, as a matter of course, when Ethelfrid fell, Edwin ascended his throne, honestly believing that it was his by right, although away in the royal palace of Bebbanburg, or Bamborough, there were three little princes, Eanfrid, Oswald, and Oswy, the eldest of whom was heir to his father's crown.

Now Ethelfrid had been a good king, and so was Edwin in his turn. If it belonged to our story we might tell how he married a Christian princess, who came from Kent, and brought a holy bishop named Paulinus with her to her northern home; and how, by and by, Edwin himself became a Christian, and founded a church at York. He also built a fortress on a great rock which stood on the northern frontier of his kingdom, and stationed soldiers there to keep watch and ward against the Picts, and named it Edwinsburgh,[1] the town or city of Edwin.

But these facts do not concern our tale, except as they throw light on the life of our hero and on the times in which he lived.

So harsh and cruel were these times that it was not considered safe for the three fatherless princes

[1] The modern Edinburgh.

to remain in Northumbria, even although the palace of Bamborough was strongly fortified, and stood on an almost impregnable rock. For every one knew that the first thing King Edwin would do was to kill them, so that he should have no fear that they would try to regain their father's throne in days to come.

But what were they to do, or where were they to go, in order to be in safety?

This was a difficult question to answer, for if they escaped to East Anglia on the south, King Raedwald, who had slain their father, would surely kill them also, while if they fled to Mercia on the west, the king of that land, Penda, was a fiercer enemy still.

The royal children were too young to decide the matter for themselves, for although we do not know the exact age of Eanfrid, it is fairly certain that Oswald, the middle boy, was about thirteen years of age, and that his little brother, Oswy, was five.

But happily they had wise and trusty counsellors in the persons of some of the Northumbrian nobles, who, although they knew that it was no use defying the new King themselves, and that the best thing that they could do was to settle down to be his obedient and loyal subjects, had no mind to allow the sons of their late and deeply loved Monarch to be cruelly put to death.

It all happened so long ago that we cannot tell exactly what took place, but we may be sure that when news came to the royal fortress of Bamborough

that King Ethelfrid had fallen, a few of the faithful nobles assembled there with speed, and, after an anxious and hurried consultation, decided to take a step which must have seemed both doubtful and strange.

Yet, now that we can look back on history and see all that "happened," as we say, in consequence of that decision, we can see that by it GOD was guiding the destinies not only of the three little boys, but of the kingdom of Northumbria, and, indeed, of the whole of Christian England, just as surely as He was guiding the destinies of the Jewish nation when He allowed Joseph to be sold into Egypt.

For, as far as we know, all these nobles were heathen, yet one or other of them had heard of a little island off the coast of the land that was inhabited by the rude and barbarous Scots, who were looked on by the more civilized people of Northumbria as savages, where a company of men had settled, who were unlike any other men they had ever heard of.

These men had come from Ireland, which was the true home of the Scots, in an open boat, some fifty years before, under the leadership of one Colum, or Columba, who was now dead, but whose name was still loved and revered, not only on the island, where he had been head and ruler, but also on the mainland, where he had gone about tending and caring for the barbarous inhabitants, nursing them when they were sick, and teaching them his doctrine.

And the doctrine which he and his followers held was a very strange one. It taught that the gods in whom most people believed, Thor and Woden, were no gods at all, and that there was only one true GOD, Who had made everything, Who was kind and loving and merciful, and Who loved peace better than war.

And because this was so, these men who lived on this far-away island were men of peace also, who spent their time in worshipping this GOD in Whom they believed, and in helping the poor savage Scots among whom they lived, and above all—and this was the matter in which the nobles were most deeply interested—in caring for a number of boys of noble birth, who were sent to them from Strathclyde, and from the kingdoms of the Picts and the Scots, in order that they might be taught to read and write, and to do many other things which these followers of S. Columba alone could teach them.

What if the little Northumbrian princes were committed to the care of these good men? It was true that they would be taught the strange doctrine which the Monks of Hii, for so the men were called, believed. But it did not matter. To the anxious nobles it seemed a question of small moment whether their charges were brought up to worship Thor and Woden or to worship the CHRIST, as the GOD of these monks was called, as long as they were kept in safety, out of the reach of their enemies, until they attained the age of manhood.

So the momentous decision was made, a decision which was to give the opportunity to one of these little boys so to live that his name is written on the bede-roll of England's Saints; and to another, of following worthily in his brother's footsteps, and being held in remembrance as a great Christian king; while to the third, alas! it only served to open the door to privileges which were neglected, and to a Faith which was denied.

But these things were all in the future, unthought of by any, when the little band of nobles, with doubtless an escort of thegns and vassals, set out, with the three fair-haired children in their midst, from Bamborough to Hii, or, as we call it nowadays, Iona.

We do not know by what route they travelled, whether they passed through the region of Strath-clyde, or, riding northward to the Firth of Forth, crossed into the country of the Picts, whose king, Brude, had been instructed in the new doctrine by the great Abbot Columba himself, and had become a Christian.

But, whichever way they journeyed, we know that the children reached their destination safely, and received a warm welcome from the busy little community of men and boys among whom they had come to dwell.

CHAPTER II

A SCHOLAR AT IONA

IF time has hidden from us the exact details of the journey by which the three little Anglo-Saxon fugitives reached their harbour of refuge, we at least know fairly accurately what they found when they arrived there.

The island of Iona was then, as it is to-day, a low, bare stretch of land, three and a half miles long, a mile and a half broad, and separated by the Sound of Mull, which at this point is a mile in width, from the mainland. It was at that time by no means so lonely and deserted as it is now; indeed it was a very hive of industry, the brightest spot in the whole of what we call Scotland, and of that part of England which lies north of the Humber and the Mersey.

We may be sure that the three boys explored the island from end to end as soon as they arrived, and we may be equally sure, princes though they were, that they saw there many things that they had never seen before.

First of all there were the monastic buildings, which, although they were not so grand or strong as the fortress which the three royal lads were

accustomed to call home, were much more interesting. They were very low and humble, built entirely of wood and wattles, between which earth had been firmly pressed down to form rude walls. With the exception of the abbot's cell, which stood by itself on a little eminence, all the other huts, for they could hardly be described as houses, were built round a central courtyard.

Then, of course, there was a church, which was always the first building that religious men of old concerned themselves with, and that was built of solid oak. There, for the first time, the heathen lads would see a Christian altar, very plain and bare no doubt, but surmounted by a cross, with mayhap a rudely carved Figure stretched upon it ; and so, in a dim, misty fashion, not yet realized or understood, the central fact of the Christian religion would be presented to their minds.

Besides the church and the cells of the monks, there were dormitories for the boys under instruction, of whom we have already spoken, a library, where copies of the Gospels and of the Psalms were kept, a refectory, in which meals were served, a kitchen, and a "hospitium" or guest chamber for the reception of visitors.

At some little distance stood what we should now call farm buildings—a barn, a byre for the cows, a mill for threshing corn, and a kiln for drying it, also a workshop, where ploughs and pails and hoes

[Valentine.

Iona Cathedral.

were fashioned, as well as the roughly-shaped desks, tables, and stools, which furnished the little huts.

Then there were the monks themselves, in whose charge the boys were left, and whom they must now obey.

As we have seen, the leader of these men, S. Columba, had brought eleven companions with him when he landed on the island. Some of these monks must have been dead, the rest very old men at this time, for Columba himself had died twenty years before, having attained the ripe age of seventy-six.

But their number had been reinforced by other monks from Ireland, and by converts from the mainland, and although a great number of these were absent from time to time on missionary journeys which extended far into the mountainous recesses of the country of the Picts, when the whole community of monks was gathered together, they numbered no less than a hundred and fifty.

They all wore the same dress—a long, coarse, white gown, over which was thrown a woollen cloak, which was just the natural colour of a sheep's fleece. This cloak had a large hood, which could be drawn over the head in very cold and stormy weather. Their heads were shaved in a very curious way, being bare across the front, while their hair grew quite long behind, and on their feet, when they were about to walk any distance, they wore sandals. Very often, however, they went bare-foot.

These monks were divided into two classes, according to their age. The older men had solemn and grave duties to perform indoors ; the younger ones worked outside. And we may be sure that it was in the younger men that the princes were most interested at first. For they did the work which the boys were accustomed to see done by the women and serfs at home. They ploughed and tilled the land, they reaped the corn, and carried it to the little mill to be ground. They baked the bread, and milked the cows, and fed the poultry. They went out fishing in curiously shaped boats which they made of wickerwork covered with hides, and when they brought home the fish they cooked them for themselves and for their brethren.

And as they went about these divers occupations, they were constantly making a curious sign, like two strokes which crossed each other. They made this sign over their milk-pails ere they began to milk, and on their bannocks before they put them into the oven, nay, the very sails of their boats were made in this shape—and the Northumbrian strangers wondered very much what it meant.

The works which the other monks did was of a different character, and may not have interested the boys so much at first. For they spent a great deal of their time in the tiny church, chanting and singing and reading to each other from a great book which lay on the altar. When they were not in church

they were very often in the room where the other books were kept, slowly and laboriously copying the characters traced on their pages on to separate sheets of parchment or vellum, which were afterwards rudely bound together by leathern thongs, and placed between wooden boards. These older monks also laboured diligently to teach the "Alumni," as the lads who had been sent to the monastery from the mainland for instruction were called, many of whom were looking forward to becoming monks also, and acting as missionaries to their own people. For the monastery at Iona was what we may term a missionary college. It did not exist solely or chiefly as a place of quietness and meditation for men who wished to withdraw from a world of turmoil and fighting, in order to benefit their own souls by trying to learn a great deal about GOD. It served this purpose as well; but the primary aim of S. Columba's life and of the lives of his followers was to carry the good news of the Gospel, which they themselves had received, into the midst of the heathen darkness which existed around them; their study, their copying of the Scriptures, their teaching and training of the young, were all means to this end.

The first task to which they had to set their three new pupils was to learn the language which they spoke, which probably was something akin to Gaelic or Erse. For it was a foreign language to the

royal lads, who would naturally speak the tongue of their ancestors, the Angles.

But when they had once mastered it, they would be set to learn what the other boys learned—writing, reading, Latin, and even Greek, for it is on record that the monks of Iona were thoroughly conversant with Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

They would also begin to learn the rudiments of the Christian Faith, and would no longer wonder what the strange sign was which the pious monks used so frequently. When they were sufficiently instructed they would be baptized, and would attend the daily services in the little church. On Sundays and Saints' Days, and especially at the great festivals of Christmas and Easter, they would join with the whole community in offering the Holy Eucharist, and would use in that solemn Service the same words of praise and thanksgiving that we use to-day.

And I have no doubt that, along with the other lads, they looked forward eagerly to these days, not, perhaps, because they had a more elaborate service in church, but because they had a more elaborate dinner, for on ordinary days they had to be content with barley bannocks, milk, eggs, and fish; while on Sundays and festivals a sheep was killed, and they were able to indulge in the treat of roast mutton.

CHAPTER III

A SOLDIER OF THE CROSS

WE must now pass over a period of seventeen years, during which history tells us nothing about our hero Oswald, except that he grew into a tall, strong, fair-haired, blue-eyed man, and that the teaching of the monks of Iona had had such good effect that he was a devoted follower of CHRIST, Whom he had learned to love with all his heart and to Whose service he had dedicated his life.

Indeed it is probable that, had his duty to his country permitted, he too would have become a monk, for his was essentially a peace-loving nature. But he was practical and far-seeing also, and he knew that the best way in which he could further GOD'S Kingdom was by helping his brother Eanfrid to regain his father's throne, and by trying to introduce the Faith of CHRIST, which to him was so dear, into the land of his birth.

For Northumbria was sunk in heathen darkness. It is true that King Edwin had become a Christian, and had begun to build a church at York. But he had been slain, in his turn, by King Penda of Mercia,

a fierce and ruthless heathen monarch ; and the good Bishop, Paulinus, who had been the instrument of Edwin's conversion, had been forced to take refuge in Kent with his royal Mistress and her children, and had become Bishop of Rochester.

Paulinus had not been able to do much teaching, for he had only been in Northumbria for a few short years, and these were spent in the southernmost part of the kingdom. So, when the mighty pagan king took possession of it, every vestige of Christianity was speedily swept away, with the exception of the half-finished church at York, which was looked after, as far as might be, by a faithful deacon named James, who just managed to keep alive his own faith, but, in his loneliness and desolation, does not seem to have been able to do much more.

It is probable that by this time all three princes had left the shelter of Iona, although the two younger of them would always regard it as home, for, in the year A.D. 633, when the clear light of history shines once more upon our story, we find Eanfrid in possession of the northern part of Northumbria, while Oswald was living in the mountainous parts of Scotland among the Picts.

How Eanfrid gained possession of his kingdom we do not exactly know. It seems almost as if he bartered his faith to gain it ; though in saying this we may be doing him an injustice. But this, unhappily, we do know—that he gave up his belief

in CHRIST, and drifted back to the ways of his ancestors, and that it was when he was trying to arrange peace with the heathen King Penda that he was treacherously slain.

Now came Oswald's opportunity to show himself, like David of old, a mighty champion for the LORD.

Hastening down from his place of waiting among the mountains, he placed himself at the head of a small band of loyal followers, who, as the story that follows seems to prove, had at least learned something about the GOD Whom their young Monarch had sworn to serve, and with them advanced to meet his heathen foe.

It was not Penda that he was called upon to fight, however, but an even fiercer enemy, Caedwalla, King of Wales, with whom Penda had allied himself, in the certainty that, with the barbarous hosts of the Welsh at his back, as well as his own Mercian subjects, he would be strong enough to crush the Northumbrian nation once and for all.

And we should have been assured of his power to do so had we seen the two armies that faced each other at a spot named Hefenfelth, or Heavenfield, which lay in the valley of the Tyne, about seven miles from Hexham. Upon a little square plateau, defended on three sides by steep banks, and on the fourth by an ancient wall, built by the Romans, Oswald's army was encamped, holding a strong position, but pitifully few

in numbers. Down below, on more level ground, was Caedwalla and his followers, an exceeding mighty host. To human eyes there could be no doubt as to the outcome of the battle.

Ah! but had we seen what took place on the night before the conflict, we should have realized that the young Northumbrian Monarch had a Power on his side far stronger than his strongest enemy. For we should have seen him, in the moonlight, giving orders to some of his men to go up to the top of a tiny mound which rose above the camp, and dig a hole there; while others were bidden to go to the forest and fell a tree, and, splitting its trunk, to bring back with them two long straight beams of wood.

With these a rude cross was formed, for Oswald was determined, whatever the outcome of the battle might be, to take possession of his kingdom for CHRIST by rearing the Holy Sign upon it, even although, in the providence of GOD, he himself might not be spared to wear his earthly crown. When the hastily-constructed rood was finished, the young King, like the true soldier of the Cross that he was, raised it aloft, and placed the end of the beam in the hole with his own hands, holding it there while his followers shovelled back the earth and stamped it down, hard and firm, with their feet.

Then, when all was finished, he gave the order to kneel, and, raising his voice so that all could hear, he

cried, "Let us jointly beseech the true and living God Almighty, in His mercy, to defend us from the fierce and haughty enemy, for He knows that we have undertaken a just war for the safety of our nation." After which every one in the little army joined with their King in prayer.

That same night, so the story goes, King Oswald had a dream or a vision—we cannot tell which. It seemed to him that S. Columba, the revered patron of Iona, from whose work and teaching all that was worthy in his own life had come, came and stood beside him, clad in a bright and glistening robe, part of which he stretched out, so that it seemed to cover not only Oswald, but the whole of his little army. "Be of good courage and play the man," said the Saint, using almost the same words that God had used long, long ago to Joshua; "at the break of day march to the battle. God hath promised thee the victory over thine enemies, and the death of tyrants. Thou shalt conquer and reign."

The morrow came. At daybreak the little army went forth to meet their savage enemies, with high hearts and a good courage, and a great and memorable victory was theirs; for the heathen host was routed and Caedwalla was slain.

Well might King Oswald have exclaimed, in the words of another Christian warrior, as once more the evening shadows fell and he gathered his weary but triumphant followers around him and looked up

at the cross which stood, like a silent sentinel, guarding the camp, "*In hoc signo vinces*"[1]—"In this sign thou shalt conquer."

[1] The motto of Constantine the Great.

CHAPTER IV

A ROYAL MISSIONARY

AFTER the victory of Hefenfelth, Oswald ascended his father's throne, and took up his residence in the fortress-palace of Bamborough, and for the next few years there was peace in the land.

For in the face of overwhelming odds he had proved himself to be both a brave and a skilful soldier, qualities which appealed to the imagination of the folk of that time, especially when the man who possessed them was a king ; and even Penda, fierce and revengeful as he was, feared to attack him again.

But Oswald had other and rarer qualities than courage and skill in arms, important and splendid as these are. He had the wise foresight of a statesman, and the moral greatness of a Christian who feels the responsibility of his position, and labours for the good of those who are set under him.

He knew the joy and light that came with the knowledge of the Blessed CHRIST, and he was determined to do all that in him lay to bring this joy and light within reach of the meanest of his subjects.

He had with his own hands planted the material cross in the soil of his kingdom ; he would not rest until the knowledge and power of that Cross had entered into the hearts of his people.

So once more a little band of loyal Northumbrians traversed the weary miles that lay between Bamborough and Iona.

But this time they were not anxious and harassed nobles seeking a place of safety among strangers for their master's children ; they were ambassadors of a king on their way to his trusted and loved friends to beg them to send him one of their number, who might teach his people the same Faith which in his boyhood he himself had learned from them.

We can fancy the joy of the old monks when they received the message. Theirs was a hard life, full of strenuous toil both of mind and body, and often they must have met with bitter disappointments, but here was pure and unmitigated success.

They had cast their bread upon the waters when they had received, without thought of reward, the three little fugitives long years before, and had, to the best of their ability, brought them up for CHRIST. And now, after many days, they were finding it again in this door that was opened to them, through which they might pass to a wider field of work in the evangelization of the great kingdom over which their spiritual son now reigned.

The prospect thus opened out before them seemed

wide enough, yet it was to prove far wider than they knew, for in the providence of GOD, and largely through the instrumentality of Oswald, the light of the Gospel was to be carried from Iona not only to the kingdom of Northumbria, but also to the kingdoms of the Mercians and the East and West Saxons.

For when a missionary was sent to him in the person of the gentle Bishop Aidan, about whom we shall learn more when we come to the story of his life, King Oswald, with far-seeing wisdom, insisted, among other things, that wherever a monastery was built a school should be attached to it where boys could be instructed in the Christian Faith, as he and his brothers had been instructed, and fitted to become missionaries who would go out in their turn to carry the light into the dark regions around them.

But we are going in advance of our story.

Aidan was not the first monk who was sent from Iona; that honour fell to one of the other brothers whose name was Corman. But he was a gloomy and austere man, who did not possess the grace of patience, and he had so little sympathy and tact that he did not get on with the people at all, and soon he gave the whole thing up and returned to his northern home.

Then Aidan was sent, who was a very different sort of man, for he was so simple and kindly that every one

loved him. Moreover, one or two other monks accompanied him.

He had been consecrated bishop just before he left Iona, and as soon as he arrived at Bamborough Oswald began to talk things over with him, and to lay down a plan of action. For we must remember that this hero of ours was no mere half-savage warrior, as we are so often inclined to think these early Makers of England were. He was a clear-headed, capable man of affairs, to whom had been granted not only the power to "perceive and know what things he ought to do," but also the "right judgement" that enabled him to take practical steps to carry out the same.

He knew that Aidan could not accomplish the work which he had come to do unless he had other monks to help him, so the first thing that he suggested was that the good Bishop should have a little piece of ground of his own on which his cathedral church could be erected, and which would be, as it were, the centre of his see. Here a monastery could also be built, and still more monks brought from Iona, who could work as missionaries in the diocese, and teach the scholars whom King Oswald was determined to have at school there.

Aidan had the length and breadth of Northumbria from which to choose the site of his monastery, but remembering the little island from which he had come, and wishing his new home to resemble his old as

closely as possible, he asked the King if he might take possession of the island of Lindisfarne, which lies about two miles out to sea, a little to the north of Bamborough.

Here his monastery was built, with a little church attached to it, in which he had his "bishop's stool," as the episcopal throne was termed in those far-off days, and here he had his famous school, from which so many well-known saints went forth to Christianize England. But these things belong more to the story of his life than that of S. Oswald, although the lives of the saintly King and the holy Bishop were so closely intertwined that it is difficult to speak of one without the other.

"But," some one may ask, "if King Oswald could not begin his education when he was a child at Iona until he had learned the language of the Scots, how did Bishop Aidan get on when he attempted to speak to the Northumbrian people in their own tongue?"

Ah! this is one of the points concerning which we feel that GOD had a purpose when He sent King Oswald to Iona in his youth.

For although the Bishop could not talk Anglo-Saxon, the King had learned to speak the language of the Scots as if it had been his mother-tongue; and if we dare compare the conduct of an earthly monarch, however holy, to that of the King of kings, we can truly say that, like his Master, Oswald of North-

York, had it buried in the porch of the church, where we may be sure that Edwin would have liked it to be laid.

So you see in all that he did at York Oswald set an example of Christian forgiveness, for every one in Northumbria must have heard how Edwin had taken their father's crown from Oswald and his brothers, and had kept it as long as he lived.

CHAPTER V

A WISE RULER

NOW although, as we have seen, King Oswald's principal concern was that the Faith of CHRIST should take root in his kingdom and be accepted by his subjects, he was not unmindful of temporal things as well.

King Edwin had won for himself the position of Bretwalda, or over-lord, over the greater part of England—that is to say, the other kings owed him a certain amount of allegiance ; and although, after his death, this sovereignty had been lost to Northumbria, Oswald determined to restore it, and win back for himself and for his people the dignity and honour which such a position bestowed.

And little by little he succeeded, obtaining first of all a certain suzerainty over the vast district of Strathclyde, whose King, if you remember, he had killed in battle. In this way a door was opened for the introduction of the Gospel into this wild region, for there was one condition which Oswald laid down with inflexible firmness wherever he obtained power, and that was that missionaries of CHRIST were to be

allowed access into that region and allowed to preach unharmed.

He also added part of East Anglia to his domains, and he obtained authority over the kingdom of Wessex by marrying a princess named Cyneburga, daughter of the monarch of that country.

It is almost certain that this royal maiden was already a Christian, because it is not likely that Oswald would have thought of taking her for his bride if she had not been; and also we know that an Italian bishop, named Birinus, had been sent about this time from Rome by Pope Honorius to help in the evangelization of England, and that he had begun his work in Wessex.

But Cyneburga's father, King Cynegils, was still a heathen, and Oswald made the stipulation that he was to become a Christian; and Cynegils, who no doubt was delighted at the thought of having the Bretwalda for his son-in-law, agreed.

Of course it is more than probable that at first, at least, Cynegils only became Christian in name, for no one can change their religion at another person's bidding; but the very fact that he had even outwardly embraced Christianity opened up the way for his subjects to be instructed in the Faith.

Oswald made sure of Cynegils taking the decisive step by offering to stand sponsor for him, so that King was baptized by Birinus, a few days before the wedding, at the royal city of Dorcic, or Dorchester, on the

Thames. Enough has come down to us to let us picture that strange scene for ourselves.

The two monarchs, the younger of whom had been a Christian from his boyhood, and the older man, who was just emerging from the darkness of heathenism, and who, in taking this step, was laying himself open to the wrath and enmity of a powerful neighbour whose kingdom bordered with his, whom all men held in dread, Penda, King of Mercia ; the foreign priest, with his white robes ; and the enormous font, made large enough to allow King Cynegils to be baptized in the primitive fashion.

After the royal catechumen had stepped into it and had been plunged under the water by Birinus, thus signifying, in the old, solemn, dramatic way, that the royal convert had indeed died unto sin, and was reborn to righteousness, his august sponsor stepped forward and "lifted him up," as if to show in a figure that he would truly do his part, and stand by his kingly brother in all the difficulties which he must face for the Faith.

And however much or little King Cynegils understood of the Christian religion at that moment, he certainly seems to have been in earnest in the vow which he had just taken, because, before the bride and bridegroom set off to their northern home, he had promised Oswald to establish a bishopric in his kingdom, the seat of which should be at Dorcic, the first bishop being Birinus.

As we shall see, the career of King Oswald of Northumbria was but a short one. But even in his lifetime it was granted to him to see some fruits of his labours. He had already founded the Bishopric of Lindisfarne in the north, and now by his efforts another "bishop's stool" was firmly planted in the south.

But looking back through the ages, we can see how much further the influence of the work which he did for the Kingdom of CHRIST extended. The names of Lindisfarne and Dorcic have disappeared from our episcopal roll, but, in their place, we find the Bishoprics of Durham, Carlisle, and Newcastle, Winchester, Oxford, and Lincoln, which were all carved out of the provinces over which he ruled, or over which his influence as Bretwalda extended; while Lichfield owes its origin to a missionary settlement which in the first place was an offshoot from Lindisfarne.

Our hero was now at the zenith of his power, and, as he was still a young man, being at this time just over thirty, we should have thought it little wonder if he had been uplifted, and had become proud and vain-glorious. But the things of this world seemed to have no power to drag down his pure and lofty spirit which was always reaching out not to earthly pomp and splendour but to a heavenly crown. As it has been said, "while guiding a temporal kingdom he laboured and prayed rather for a heavenly crown."

[Gibson, Hexham.

S. Oswald.

When he was not attending to affairs of government, either in his own land or in those over which he had the right of sovereignty, he lived at home in his Palace of Bamborough with his wife and his little son Ethelbald. And, to the end of his life, his greatest joy was to go up and down the country with his friend and adviser, Bishop Aidan, or with some of his monks, acting as interpreter for those who could not yet speak the language, and superintending the building of churches at various points in his kingdom.

There is one anecdote told which belongs to this part of his reign, which, although it is very well known, must find a place here.

On Easter Day the King was sitting at dinner with Bishop Aidan, and, in honour of the festival, a silver dish of dainty meats was placed upon the table. Aidan was about to bless the food preparatory to partaking of it, when the thegn whose duty it was to watch at the gate of the palace and distribute alms in the King's name to the poor folk who came to crave for them, appeared in the apartment with the news that the streets of the royal city, for so the old chroniclers term the town which lay at the foot of the rock on which the fortress-palace was built, were full of beggars, so that there was not food for them all.

Forgetful of his own hunger and that of his friend, Oswald instantly ordered the silver dish to be carried out and its contents divided among the poor, adding that, when this had been done, the dish itself was to be

cut in pieces, and these pieces were to be distributed like coins among the beggars.

Struck by this act of self-denial on the part of his royal master, the good Bishop seized the King's right hand and exclaimed earnestly, " May this hand never perish ! " which saying, as we shall hear, was long remembered in Northumbria.

CHAPTER VI

A MARTYR KING

BUT the powers of evil were once more gathering round our hero. For King Penda of Mercia, finding himself gradually being driven into a position of splendid isolation in the centre of England by the advancing tide of Christianity, which, fostered by Oswald, was slowly spreading in the kingdoms adjoining his own, determined once more to muster all the forces at his command, and exalt the standard of Thor and Woden against that of the new-found CHRIST. So he went to war against the East Anglians, knowing full well that Oswald of Northumbria would hasten to their succour, and mayhap place himself in his power.

And this was exactly what befell. Oswald hastened southward, and the two monarchs met in battle on August 5, A.D. 642, at a place called Maserfelth,[1] in the south-west of Mercia. Here, after a fierce and deadly conflict, the "great and beloved Oswald," as an old chronicler calls him, was slain, leaving his

[1] Supposed to be near Oswestry. Hence the name "Oswald's Tree."

followers heart-broken, for no monarch before him had been so much beloved. The story of his death is very touching, yet it makes us proud and happy to feel that we can number this hero amongst our English Saints. For when, at last, after long fighting, the battle began to go against him, and he found himself cut off from his followers, and surrounded by a host of Mercian archers who shot their arrows into his body as if it had been a target, his thoughts were not for himself but for his subjects.

"O LORD," he cried, lifting his eyes to the blue heavens over his head, "have mercy on the souls of my people." Then a battle-axe cleft his skull, and so he died.

And surely we may venture to read into these words a wider and deeper meaning than that which is generally given to them, and believe that at that awful moment the Missionary-King's thoughts turned not only to those of his faithful followers who were laying down their lives around him, but also to the whole body of his subjects, men, women, and little children, whose faith in the Gospel was as yet weak and unstable, and that the cry of earnest entreaty which went up to GOD was as much for the living as for the dead.

Oswald was only thirty-eight years old when he passed to his rest; yet he left a record behind him which many a one who lives twice as long may envy.

As some one has said of him, "He was gentle and strong, a soldier and a king, a missionary and a martyr,

slain in the flower of his youth on the field of battle, fighting for his King and for his country, praying for his subjects."

Surely the Church was justified in after days in inscribing his name on the roll of her Saints.

After the battle was over his body was recognized and brought to the victorious Penda, and he, fierce pagan warrior that he was, gave orders that the head and hands of his enemy should be cut off and placed on stakes stuck in the ground, so that every one might see what had befallen the man who had been rash enough to take up arms against him.

His poor mutilated body was thrown carelessly aside, but some faithful friend must have buried it in some spot which could be identified. For, thirty years afterwards, when the tide had turned, when Penda had been slain in battle, and his son Peada had embraced Christianity, and had allied himself to Oswald's own family by marrying his brother Oswy's daughter, that royal lady had her uncle's remains taken reverently from their resting-place and conveyed to the monastery of Bardney in Lincolnshire, there to be buried within the abbey church.

But the monks, with most unchristian feelings—remembering that the bones thus brought to their door were those of the monarch who had conquered their country, for Bardney lay in that part of Lindesey which had been joined to Northumbria—refused to take them in, and as there was no other

place of shelter within reach, they were allowed to remain outside the gates all night on the wagon which had brought them, with nothing but a covering thrown over them.

But through the night, so the story goes, the astonished monks were startled by a very bright light which shone into their dormitories, and aroused them from their slumbers. When they crowded to the casements to find out from whence it came, they saw, as it were, a pillar of flame reaching aslant from the clouds to where the bones of the dead king lay, and lighting up all the country around with its radiance. By which sign they recognized that they were shutting their gates to the relics of one of God's elect, and as soon as morning dawned they ran with haste to fling them open and to carry the now sacred burden into the church. There they washed the bones with all reverence and placed them in a chest, over which was afterwards hung the purple and gold banner which had waved over our hero's head as he went into his last battle. This banner had always been carried behind Oswald, along with a spear crowned with a tuft of feathers, these being the ensigns of the Bretwalda.

A hundred years afterwards the then King of Mercia, Offa, placed Oswald's remains in a beautiful shrine, which he caused to be ornamented with gold and jewels.

In A.D. 909 this shrine was removed to the great

abbey church at Gloucester, which was considered the most fitting resting-place in the whole of Mercia for the remains of the Martyr King, who even at that date had come to be looked on by the Church as a Saint.

Long ere these events took place the head and the hands of our hero had found their own place of sepulchre.

After they had remained on the stakes on which they had been exposed for a whole year, bleaching in the wind and rain, King Oswy, who had succeeded his brother on the Northumbrian throne, managed to get possession of them, and had them brought home to his native land.

There the hands that had ever been ready to succour the poor and destitute were laid in a silver coffer and placed in a little church at Bamborough, dedicated to S. Peter, which stood near the castle rock.

And, as years went by, a beautiful legend came to be whispered by one and another of the simple country-folk who came to say their prayers beside the tiny shrine. 'Twas said that the hand that had given so generously to the poor on that bygone Easter Day, and which had been blessed by Bishop Aidan, lay within the coffer just as it had been in the days of Oswald's life, fresh and fair and uncorrupted.

And from this legend grew the name that his subjects loved to remember their noble-hearted monarch by, "Oswald Lamngwin"—"Oswald of the white hand." This coffer was stolen many years

afterwards by a monk from Peterborough, who wished to enrich his own abbey church by its possession.

King Oswald's head was carried to Lindisfarne by Bishop Aidan, and buried in the churchyard there. Later, it was taken back to Bamborough and kept for some years in the same little church in which the severed hands rested. Then, in S. Cuthbert's time, and at his bidding, it was once more buried at Lindisfarne.

Many years afterwards, when the Danes were threatening to ravage the little island, it was taken from its resting-place, and, along with some of the bones of S. Aidan, it was placed in the coffin of S. Cuthbert and carried to the mainland, and after many wanderings found a final resting-place in Durham Cathedral.

So three of our great cathedral churches—Gloucester, Peterborough, and Durham—are hallowed by memories of S. Oswald, and somewhere among their foundations his scattered ashes must rest. We know where his head lies at Durham ; in the other two minsters no trace of their place of sepulchre remains.

Oswald's type of saintliness was one which especially appeals to the nation to which he belonged. In his character was neither weakness nor hesitancy ; none of his doings were grotesque. He was no mere dreamer of dreams and seer of visions. He was that, but he was more. He saw life sanely and as a whole, and, drawing inspiration from his dreams and visions, he

sought to weave into the rough warp of ignorance and unrest and strife which he found around him the golden woof of the knowledge of God, and the love of His ways.

He prayed much, but he worked as well ; he was a "holy and humble man of heart," yet he ruled his kingdom with a firm hand. Wherever he went in his kingly power, truth and justice and righteousness sprang up in his steps ; and, to the simple-minded folk of his age, the very spot where he died was the better for his presence, for "the grass grew greener where Oswald fell."

And surely, as we think of the City of God, which one day will be revealed in all its perfection, we may claim for him that he will be found among those "kings of the earth" who have "brought their glory and honour into it."

S. AIDAN

S. AIDAN

CHAPTER I

A CRY FOR AID

NOW we come to the story of the second of the three Saints to whom the Northumbrian Church owed her existence in the early days of Christianity—I mean S. Aidan.

Practically nothing is known of his birth or early manhood. Tradition says that he was Irish, which is more than probable, seeing that many of the monks of Iona came from the same country as their Founder, S. Columba, and that he was a relation of S. Bridget.

But all that we know definitely about him is that he was living as a monk at Iona when, in A.D. 635, the messengers arrived from King Oswald of Northumbria asking for a missionary for his people.

It was not on Aidan that the first choice fell, but on Corman, one of his brother monks, who was, we are told, a man of grave deportment and great learning, qualities which, if the "grave deportment" signified gravity and a due sense of responsibility, seemed to mark him out as a suitable man for the work to which he was sent.

One wonders if Aidan were one of the brothers who

went to see him off and bid him God-speed at the little landing-stage at Iona, down by the barn and the mill and the workshop ; and, if he were, if there was a faint longing in his heart, as he saw the boat in which Corman sat heading towards the mainland, that he had been chosen, or at least that he had had the chance of taking a share in this new enterprise which seemed to promise such possibilities of work for God.

Perhaps he wondered also if Corman were quite the right man for the work, for, although the latter was a grave and learned priest, he was inclined to be harsh and impatient with the poor people with whom he had to deal, if their minds were slow and sluggish, and if they did not understand.

If such thoughts did rise in Aidan's mind, however, we may be sure that he tried to crush them at once, and turned all his attention to whatever work he had on hand, which was his duty at the moment.

A few months afterwards Corman returned, rather like a child in a pet, if the truth must be told. The Northumbrian people would not listen to him, so he said, and he had given the whole thing up and come home.

Greatly distressed, the Abbot called all the brethren of the monastery together in council to consider what was to be done, for he could not bear to think that the young King, who had lived among them so long, should look to them in vain for aid in his attempts to bring the news of salvation to his people.

When they were all assembled, the monks desired to hear the reasons which had induced Corman to give up the work which had been committed to him in Northumbria ; and Corman answered their questions shortly and bluntly, laying all the blame on the people to whom he had been sent, and taking none to himself. The reason why he had not done any good to the Northumbrians, he explained, was that "they were uncivilized men and of a stubborn and barbarous disposition."

When he had said all that he had to say, another voice was heard, to which every one listened ; for the speaker, Aidan, was so calm and gentle and yet so sensible that every one in the monastery looked up to him with esteem and respect.

"I am of opinion, Brother," he said mildly, "that thou wert more severe to thine unlearned hearers than thou oughtest to have been, and did not at first, conformably to the Apostolic rule, give them milk of more easy doctrine, till, being by degrees nourished by the Word of GOD, they should be capable of greater perfection, and be able to practise GOD'S sublimer precepts."

His criticism sounded so sensible that it was felt by all present that here was a man who seemed to have the proper qualifications for a missionary, and that he might succeed where Corman had failed, so by common consent it was agreed that another trial should be made, and that Aidan should go to the help of King Oswald.

And so certain does the Abbot of Iona seem to have been that Aidan would be able to accomplish the work of establishing Christianity in the heathen lands to which he was going, that, before he gave him his blessing and sent him forth, he had him consecrated bishop, so that he might have power and authority to form and rule a diocese, and, as time went on, ordain priests and confirm converts.

And realizing, perhaps, that it would have been better if Corman had had the strength and support that companionship brings, the Abbot sent a little company of monks along with Aidan, who could work under him in whichever way he pleased.

We may be sure that King Oswald gave the little band of missionaries a hearty welcome when they arrived at his Court in the summer of A.D. 635 ; and, from the account that has come down to us of the missionary-bishop's character, we may be sure that, as soon as the King had had some conversation with him, he must have felt that this time he had found the right man.

For Aidan was, as an old chronicler has left on record, " inspired with a passionate love of goodness, but at the same time full of a surpassing gentleness and moderation." It has also been said of him that it was his life rather than his preaching that converted Northumbria ; for he never preached what he did not practise, and although he was a bishop he was as accessible and humble-minded as the lowliest of his

monks. He also possessed great tact and judgement, and was so full of sympathy that he could enter into other people's troubles as if they were his own, so that there was no danger of his losing patience with the simple and unlearned country-folk.

CHAPTER II

LINDISFARNE

AS soon as Aidan and his companions arrived, King Oswald consulted him about the important work to be undertaken. And in order that there should be a definite centre of Christianity in the kingdom, he asked the Bishop to choose some special spot which might be looked upon as the seat of his bishopric, where he and his monks could take up their abode, and begin at once to build a church.

As Aidan had the whole of the kingdom from which to choose, it was perhaps something of a surprise to the King when the Bishop asked that the little wind-swept island of Lindisfarne, which lay out in the sea some miles to the north of Bamborough, should be given to him for this purpose. But the choice was a very natural one.

Wherever Aidan had been born, Iona was his home. There he had spent many useful and happy years, there, as far as we know, he had received his training for his work, and there he had formed his ideals.

And we may be certain that the person whose example and memory he admired and revered above all

others was the great Apostle of his race, the Founder and earliest Ruler of his monastic order, S. Columba himself.

This being so, it was little wonder that he would wish to follow closely in his leader's footsteps, and mould the community life, which he himself was now called upon to rule, as closely as possible upon his.

So when the question was brought before him of a choice of a home, and he saw this little island lying out in the sea, so like, in all its features, even to its bareness and barrenness, the other island that he loved so well, it would seem to him that GOD was indeed allowing him to copy his hero, even in the smallest details ; and we can fancy how eagerly he would turn to the King and beg that there, and there only, the site of his cathedral church should be.

There were two other reasons which may have influenced him in his choice of a home, although I do not think that they would have the same importance in his eyes as that which I have already mentioned. One of these reasons is quite easily understood—the other needs some explanation.

Lindisfarne is close to Bamborough, therefore Aidan must have felt that he and his monks would have all the protection which the King was able to afford them. It is also a long way from York, and this is the reason which needs to be explained.

Even in those far-off days a Church existed in our

land that did not owe obedience to Rome. That Church was the native Church of the country, the Celtic or British Church. It had been formed when Christianity was first brought to Britain in the days of the Romans, and its founders are believed to have come from Gaul. It was almost entirely swept out of Britain when the Angles and Saxons invaded the land, although it always kept a certain foothold in Wales.

It was not driven out of Ireland, however, because the fierce heathen invaders did not take the trouble to go there, being satisfied with the country which they had already conquered. So in Ireland it grew and prospered for two hundred years, during which England and Scotland were plunged once more into pagan darkness. This was, as we know, the Church which sent Columba to Iona, and so once more lit the torch of the Gospel in the north. And it is needless to say that it was to this old Celtic Church that Aidan and his monks belonged.

But at the time of which we are speaking another branch of the Church had taken root in the south. This was connected directly with Rome, having been formed by Augustine, who had been sent to England by Pope Gregory, and who had chosen for his episcopal seat the city of Canterbury.

These two branches of the Church held the same doctrines in all things that were essential, but there were some minor points of difference which caused

a great deal of bitter feeling. Chief among them was the time of keeping the Easter festival, and the tonsure, or way in which priests' heads were shaven.

The whole of Christendom agreed with the Bishop of Rome on these two points with the exception of the little British Church, the bishops of which, in consequence of their isolated position, had not had the opportunity of meeting their brethren in council, and so had fallen into different customs and different ways.

It was a pity that it should have been so, for we must remember that the Roman Church of those days was much simpler in faith, and purer in doctrine than she is now ; and it would surely have been better, and more in keeping with the belief in the Communion of Saints, if the Church as a whole could have kept its Easter feast together, instead of one part of it rejoicing, while the other was still observing the fast of Lent.

Also when we understand that priests who followed the usage of Rome shaved the crown of their heads, so as to leave a ring of hair all round, to remind themselves of the crown of thorns which had been worn by their LORD, we can see the reason why they looked on their Celtic brethren as wholly in the wrong when they shaved the front of their heads from ear to ear, after, it was said, an old heathen custom of the Druids.

On the other hand, as we look back over the ages,

we can sympathize with the leaders of the little native Church which had been so staunch and true all through the dark ages of paganism, when it had been entirely cut off from all communication with the Church in other lands, when they clung with a stubborn tenacity to their own usages and said, "What does it matter what they do in Rome; we will follow in the steps of our forefathers."

And it has been supposed that it was this feeling that helped to keep Aidan from choosing York as his episcopal city. At York, as we have seen, he would have found a church already built, with a faithful deacon to welcome him and aid him. But York had had dealings with Canterbury, and the deacon James followed the Roman use, so it is quite possible that the wise, peace-loving Bishop thought it better to begin his work in a district where there would be no danger of friction or clashing of opinions. At any rate he prepared to settle at Lindisfarne, and doubtless King Oswald was glad to have him so near him.

As soon as the little company of monks took possession of their island,[1] they proceeded to erect

[1] We have spoken of Lindisfarne as an island. But this is perhaps hardly a correct description, as twice during the twenty-four hours of each day, at ebb tide, the sands between the island and the shore are left bare, and may be traversed in safety if the traveller knows the path. In consequence of the memories connected with Lindisfarne it came to be spoken of as "Holy Island," which is the name it commonly bears to-day.

[Gibson, Hexham.

Lindisfarne.

a church and monastery. These would be very simple buildings, merely a low church, which we are told was built of wood and wattles, with a few huts clustering round, after the fashon of Iona.

They had a school also, for having seen the result of King Oswald's education, and knowing the King's feelings on the matter, Aidan knew that he could not do better than follow the example of Columba, and devote much of his time and energy to educating and training native Northumbrian lads, who in time might go out in their turn to act as missionaries to their fellow-countrymen. So he began with twelve boys whose parents were willing that their sons should embrace the new doctrine, and whom he thought were suited for his purpose.

The names of some of these lads are well known to us, for they became bright and shining lights of the Church in after years, and carried on the work which their master had begun, right nobly.

There was the gentle Eata, Abbot of Mailros, who founded Ripon Abbey, and who finally became Bishop of Hexham, and his friend the saintly Boisil, who served under him as Prior of Mailros, and whose name is perpetuated in that of the little Scottish village of St. Boswells. There was Wilfrid, who became one of the most powerful of English Churchmen, and the brothers Cedd and Chad, who, fired with the true missionary spirit, went forth to convert the East Anglians and the Mercians, and in time

became the bishops of these nations, Cedd having his seat at Tilbury, Chad at Lichfield.

Of course the fact that their King was a Christian, and that he was always ready to help the new preachers who had come among them by acting as interpreter, had a wonderful effect on the Northumbrians, especially on the nobles who were constantly about the Court, and many of them speedily embraced the new faith.

We know this, because, although but scanty records of S. Aidan's ministry have been preserved for us, we are told that after his arrival in the country it was not long before churches began to be built here and there, and that it was the nobles who built them, and granted land round about them to the Bishop, so that, if he pleased, he could found little monasteries, to be, as it were, off-shoots from the parent stem.

At first Aidan felt that the time was not ripe for this, so he used to sell most of the land, only reserving to himself a tiny piece on which a hut or "cell" could be built, in which he or one of his monks could lodge, when they passed that way to hold service in the church, and spend a few days in instructing the people.

In this way he obtained large sums of money, which he put to a very beautiful use. At that time it was quite a common thing for both Saxons and Celts to sell their children like cattle, not caring in the least what became of them. And the good Bishop used

to redeem these children, and take them to Lindisfarne and educate them. And if they turned out well, and were fitted for the sacred office, he ordained them to the priesthood and sent them forth, as he had sent his earliest scholars, to be missionaries.

But of course that was the work of years, and before some of the children whom he had redeemed had grown up and been ordained, their kind benefactor had passed to his rest.

There was one habit of Bishop Aidan's which made a great impression on the people among whom he had come to dwell. In a country where every one of any rank at all owned a horse, and put great store on horsemanship, he always travelled on foot, going about in this way, from place to place, like the meanest serf.

Sometimes he was accompanied by one or other of his monks on these journeys, and if so, he expected him to read portions of the Scriptures as they walked along, or to learn some of the Psalms. Every one he met he spoke to, asking them if they had accepted the Faith of CHRIST. If they had not heard of it, or had not done so, he explained it to them, while, if they chanced to be Christians, he would exhort them to act up to their profession.

As years went on, the number of the brethren at Lindisfarne increased, for when they heard how eagerly the Northumbrians were listening to the message which was being preached by Aidan and

his monks, other monks joined them both from Ireland and from Iona. This being so, Aidan now felt that he might extend his work by founding little separate communities at various places up and down the country, which might serve as centres of light, and from which monks might go out to preach in the surrounding districts.

By this time the twelve boys who had been his first scholars had grown to manhood, for one of the best known of the communities which were off-shoots from Lindisfarne, that which found its home at Mailros, on the banks of the Tweed,[1] was ruled over, as we have seen, by two of them, Eata and Boisil. The monastery at Coldingham, near S. Abb's Head, of which S. Ebba, sister of King Oswald, was Abbess, is also said to have been founded by Bishop Aidan in his latter years. It was what was known as a double community, that is, there were two distinct parts of the monastery, one for men, the other for women. In this respect it resembled the famous monastery at Whitby ruled over by S. Hilda.

Such, then, were the fruits of the seventeen years during which this great and wise and kindly Bishop ruled the infant Church of Northumbria.

As I have said before, we have very scanty material out of which to weave the story of his life.

[1] The site of this earliest monastery was not at the Melrose of to-day, but was situated about two miles further down the Tweed, opposite Bemersyde. It is now known as Old Melrose.

What we know about him has been told us by a monk of Jarrow-on-Tyne who lived about fifty years after the Missionary-Bishop, and who wrote a great history, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, which tells us all that we know about the introduction of Christianity into Britain.

Every one knows this monk's name—the Venerable Bede.

But sufficient is told us to show that our hero was a veritable Father-in-God to his flock, not in name only, but in deed as well.

He laid no store by riches, he was kind to the needy, he counted no service too small to render, if by it he could win a way for the Gospel of Christ, Whose ambassador he was. He lived the life of a poor man, and cared for the children of the slaves. As Bede has it, "he left to the clergy a most wholesome example of abstinence—he lived among his friends none otherwise than he taught. He cared not to seek anything, to love anything belonging to this world. He loved peace and charity, he was superior to avarice, he despised pride and vain glory, he was industrious in keeping and teaching the heavenly commandments, he was diligent in reading and watching, he used his authority as a priest in reproving the haughty and powerful, and at the same time his tenderness in comforting the afflicted, and in relieving and defending the poor."

CHAPTER III

THE FRIEND OF KINGS

BUT although the general outlines of S. Aidan's life are somewhat vague and indefinite, some incidents in it have been recorded which stand out clearly and distinctly.

We have already heard of one of these, and have perhaps pictured to ourselves that Easter Day, so many centuries ago, when the Bishop, contrary to his custom, dined with the King (for we read that great as his friendship with Oswald was, he could hardly be persuaded to eat at his table, or if he did, he only partook of one or two dishes, then hurried away to read or write).

We have seen the official almsgiver carrying the news to his Royal Master of the unusual number of destitute folk who were crowding to the palace gate. And we have perhaps wondered, if, for a moment, a feeling of regret did not rise even in the heart of this most self-denying of prelates, as he saw the Easter dainties which he was about to bless disappear untasted from the table.

The other stories are told of the Bishop in later

years, when the beloved Oswald having been slain in battle, his kingdom was divided between his brother Oswy and his cousin Oswin, Oswin reigning over the southern part, which was called Deira, and Oswy over the northern, which was known as Bernicia.

With both of these monarchs Aidan was on friendly terms, but especially with Oswin, whom he seems to have loved almost as much as he had loved Oswald.

Now it happened that King Oswy wanted a wife, and being a Christian himself, he wished to wed a Christian maiden. And his thoughts turned to his cousin Eanfleda, the daughter of his uncle, King Edwin, which princess, as we have read, had been obliged in her childhood to take refuge in Kent, with her widowed mother and Bishop Paulinus, when her father had been killed by Penda.

So Oswy commissioned a very discreet and learned priest named Utta to travel to Kent and bring the royal maiden to Northumbria. For some reason the King's orders were that the party was to journey by sea, and Utta seems to have been a little afraid of this mode of travel, for before he set out he went to Bishop Aidan to ask for his prayers and his blessing.

Aidan not only gave him these, but he gave him a flagon of holy oil as well, saying kindly, "I know that when thou goest abroad thou wilt meet with a storm and contrary wind, but do thou remember to cast this oil I give thee into the sea, and the wind will cease

immediately. Thou shalt have pleasant, calm weather, and return home safe."

All which befell as the Bishop had said. For the travellers encountered such a storm that the sailors endeavoured to ride at anchor. But this was of no avail, for the waves were so high that they broke over the ship, which was in great danger of sinking. Then Utta remembered Aidan's words, and took the oil and poured it into the sea ; and lo, to every one's amazement it presently became calm.

These were the days of simple, childish faith, when no one believed miracles to be impossible, when, indeed, they were always expecting them to happen. So of course Bede speaks of it as a miracle.

But we can see in it Aidan's practical experience of sea-faring life, learned when he guided boats, which his own hands had fashioned, through the rough and stormy seas that lay around Iona. Doubtless he had had many a perilous crossing to and fro from the mainland, and had often used crude oil, obtained from the seals which he and his brethren caught, to calm the waves which threatened to engulf his little craft. And, as the monks of Iona were accustomed to make the sign of the Cross over everything that they used, he made it over the oil also. And because of this, and of the way in which, with his sailor's knowledge, he was able to foretell that Utta and his royal charge were likely to encounter stormy weather on the North Sea,

the folk of his time saw in the incident the direct intervention of God.

Another story tells us how King Oswin wished to give the Bishop an extraordinarily fine horse, although he knew that he always travelled on foot. And he induced him to accept it by representing that he might use it when some urgent summons came to him which had to be responded to in haste, or for fording rivers too deep to cross on foot.

Aidan allowed the animal to be taken to the monastery, and he rode it occasionally when he had need of it. But one day as he was riding along he met a beggar who asked for alms. As the man was in great want, and the good Bishop had nothing else to give him, he dismounted, and, commanding the monk who was with him to give the horse and all its trappings to the poor man, continued his journey on foot.

When the King heard of this he was rather angry, because he thought his gift had been despised, and the next time that Aidan had dinner with him he said sharply, "Why would you, my Lord Bishop, give that poor man that royal horse, which was necessary for your use? Had not we many other horses of less value, and of other sorts, which would have been good enough to give to the poor, and not to give that horse, which I had particularly chosen for yourself?"

But if he thought his anger would daunt the Bishop he was mistaken. "What is it you say, O King,"

replied Aidan calmly, "Is that foal of a mare more dear to you than a son of God?"

The King could not answer this, but he seems to have treated Aidan for the time with displeasure, for we read that the Bishop sat down in his place, but the King, who was come from hunting, stood warming himself, with his attendants, at the fire.

"Then on a sudden," so the quaint old record goes on, "whilst he was warming himself, calling to mind what the Bishop had said to him, he ungirt his sword and gave it to a servant, and in a hasty manner fell down at the Bishop's feet, beseeching him to forgive him. "For from this time forward," said he, "I will never speak any more of this, nor shall I judge what or how much of our money you shall give to the sons of God."

Having thrown off his sullen mood, Oswin joined the Bishop at table, and became very light-hearted and merry, while Aidan, to the astonishment of every one, grew more and more sad. Seeing this his "companion priest," which means, I suppose, what would now be termed his chaplain, asked him in the Celtic tongue, which they two alone understood, what the matter was.

"I know," replied the Bishop, with tears in his eyes, "that the King will not live long, for I never before saw so humble a king, whence I conclude that he will soon be snatched out of this life, because this nation is not worthy of such a ruler."

Which prediction, curious to say, came true, for

[Valentine.

Bamborough Castle.

shortly afterwards King Oswin was treacherously murdered by King Oswy, who desired to rule over the whole of Northumbria, as his brother Oswald had done before him.

The last story told about our hero is the most picturesque of all. Towards the close of Oswin's reign King Penda of Mercia once more sought to overthrow the Christian Faith by entering Bernicia at the head of his heathen hordes, and trying to vanquish its king. At first it seemed as if he would be entirely successful, for Oswin's soldiers had to retire before his victorious march, and the whole country was ravaged and made desolate.

At last the fierce invader reached the city of Bamborough, and straightway besieged the royal stronghold which towered above it. But the palace proved impregnable, and the inmates had sufficient provisions to enable them to bid defiance to their foe.

Thereupon Penda resorted to other means. With great barbarity he destroyed all the villages in the neighbourhood, and, taking from their ruins vast quantities of beams, wattles, and thatch, he brought them to Bamborough, and, piling them up to an immense height round the city walls, set fire to them, hoping in this way to burn the town.

And he might have succeeded had not a wonderful thing happened in answer to prayer—just as it happened long centuries afterwards at the siege of Leyden in the Netherlands.

For Aidan, cut to the heart at the thought of all that his flock had suffered at the hands of the fierce invaders, had left his monastery at Lindisfarne, and retired to a smaller island named Farne, which lay just opposite the fortress.

He was in the habit of retiring to this island whenever he wished to be alone for a period of prayer and meditation ; and here he was keeping watch day after day, wrestling in agonized prayer lest the royal city, the centre and citadel of the kingdom, should fall before the heathen foe. When at last he saw the smoke rising in the distance and realized what this latest device of Penda's must mean, he raised his hands to heaven with a last wild cry of entreaty, "Behold, LORD, how great mischief Penda doeth!"

And lo! his cry was heard, for the wind changing suddenly, the smoke and flames were driven away from the city back on the besiegers, burning some, and frightening the rest, who believed that such a strange deliverance could only have befallen those who were under the protection of the Christians' GOD. So they raised the siege and went their way, and Bamborough was saved.

CHAPTER IV

"QUIES AIDANI"

AS we saw in the last chapter, King Oswin met his death by treachery at the hands of his cousin Oswy. This was a very great grief to the peace-loving Bishop, for both of the young kings were his friends; moreover, they were both Christians, and it seemed to him a terrible thing that one of them should lift his hand against the other.

Perhaps the trouble and sadness of it all shortened his life, for he died just twelve days after the fatal deed.

He was not at Lindisfarne, but out on one of his missionary journeys, when he was seized with illness. We do not know exactly where he was. Bede gives us the information that he was at the "king's country-house," not far from Bamborough, and that there he had a chamber or cell, besides the church, where he was wont to lodge for days or weeks at a time, going out to the surrounding districts and preaching.

What his illness was, or how long it lasted, we cannot tell, but we gather that the sick man was restless and ill at ease; for apparently he could not remain in his little chamber, but wished to be outside in the fresh

air. So some of his monks, who were tenderly caring for him, set up a tent close to the wall at the west end of the church, in which he could sit when he chose.

A wooden post had been driven into the ground close to the west wall of the sacred building, to strengthen it, and on the last day of August, A.D. 651, the great, wise, humble-minded Missionary-Bishop died, not in his bed, but in the open air, leaning up against this post, with his head resting upon it.

Perhaps his illness had been very distressing, perhaps he had suffered much, and longed for it to end; for the name which was inscribed in the old Church calendars to mark the day of his passing is very beautiful—"*Quies Aidani*," "Aidan's rest."

Round the rude beam which had lent him its support in his last moments a curious legend arose. It was said that it could not be destroyed, and that although the church which was reared against it was twice burned to the ground, it was left untouched by the flames. In consequence of which wonder, when the church was rebuilt for the third time, it was not left to serve as a support, but placed within the walls and treated as a holy thing.

The body of Bishop Aidan was carried with loving reverence to his island home, where it was buried in the little monastic burying-ground. In later years, when a larger and more stately church took the place of the first humble little edifice, his bones were translated, as it was called, from their grave outside, and

placed, probably in a shrine, on the right hand of the altar.

But they were not allowed to remain there undisturbed—and we are glad that they were not. For they would have been cast out and scattered to the winds when, two hundred years afterwards, the fierce Vikings of the North swept down upon our shores, and, along with many other holy places, harried and burned the island monastery.

But, as we shall see when we come to the story of S. Cuthbert's life, owing to the disputes which arose about the Easter controversy, a later abbot, named Colman, gave up his post and retired with a number of his monks to Iona ; and, when he did so, he carried some of Aidan's bones with him. So they were finally laid to rest in the old home in the western sea, and we may be sure that it would have been a joy to our hero could he have known that it would be so.

The remainder of his bones were hurriedly taken from their receptacle when the monks fled at the approach of the Danes, and, along with the head of S. Oswald, were placed in S. Cuthbert's coffin and carried in haste from the island.

S. CUTHBERT

S. CUTHBERT

CHAPTER I

THE CALL OF GOD

ON the night on which S. Aidan died a shepherd lad was watching his sheep on the bare hills that slope down to the banks of the river Leader, a tributary of the Tweed. He was no mere uncouth, uncultured serf, but was of better birth, being of the rank of the vassals to whom the great Saxon lords handed over the care of their vast flocks of sheep and cattle, and to whom they probably paid a good wage. He was an orphan, for his parents were both dead, and he lived with a foster-mother named Kenspid, in a little cottage among the hills.

This Kenspid, whom the boy loved dearly, was a very holy woman, who had learned the Faith of CHRIST from the missionary-monks of the Monastery of Mailros, which was situated a few miles away, near where the Leader joined the Tweed.

This Faith she had taught to her foster-son, Cuthbert, for that was the lad's name. He had laid it to heart and pondered over it until its influence had moulded his character, so that, young as he was, his mind was full of holy thoughts and desires ; and, as

he went about his daily work, he was constantly thinking about God and wondering how best he could serve Him.

Perhaps those feelings had been deepened by something that had happened when he was about eight years old. He had been playing with a number of other boys when one of them suddenly said to him, "O Cuthbert, most holy prelate and priest, it becomes not you to sport among children, you whom the Lord has consecrated to be a teacher of virtue to your elders."

The old historian Bede, who wrote a *Life of S. Cuthbert* as well as the *Ecclesiastical History*, hints that this was a special revelation from God, but it is probable that it was merely some boyish joke, made because the other lads felt that in some way Cuthbert was more thoughtful and serious than they were.

At any rate the incident is true, for, when he was a man, Cuthbert spoke of it himself; and the words of his playfellows seem to have haunted his boyish mind ever afterwards, and made him try to be good and unselfish, and to say his prayers as carefully and earnestly as possible.

But he was not a prig. We must not carry away that idea of him. We are told that he excelled other lads of his age in all manner of sports and games. He could beat all his companions in a race. He excelled especially in games that required skill or strength, and he was a brave and fearless fighter

and hunter. In fact, he was a strong, manly youth, who thoroughly enjoyed life, good to look upon, with a bright, cheerful spirit.

On this particular night of which we are speaking, August 31, A.D. 651, Cuthbert was startled by seeing a strange light in the sky.

Perhaps it was some beautiful effect of cloud and moonlight, or glory of sunrise ; perhaps his eyes were really " opened " like those of Elisha's servant, and he was allowed to see things which are generally hidden from men's eyes. But whatever it was, it seemed to the shepherd lad that he saw heaven open and a company of angels fly down to earth and then return, bearing in their midst a bright resplendent soul whose earthly days were over.

Greatly impressed, the lad returned to his companions, who, like the shepherds of Bethlehem, were in the habit of spending both day and night in the open air, and awoke them to tell what he had seen.

They would not listen to his story, however, and laughed at him, calling him a dreamer and other contemptuous names.

A few days afterwards news came to the Abbey of Mailros, and from thence spread through the surrounding district, that the great and beloved Bishop Aidan, by whose unceasing labour and unwearied teaching the knowledge of CHRIST had been brought to the Northumbrian people, had passed away. The tidings came as a sad blow to the little community of monks

at Mailros, especially to Abbot Eata and Boisil the Prior, who, as we have seen, had been two of the dead Bishop's "boys."

But to the lad Cuthbert, tending his sheep on their hirsel[1] among the solitude of the hills, they came bringing with them a clear and distinct call to more definite consecration, to closer service.

To whom he imparted the resolution which he speedily made we do not know. He must have told it to his companions, who doubtless laughed at him, and to his foster-mother Kenspid, who would certainly give him her blessing. The next thing that we read of is that one sunny September day a knock came at the door of the monastery at Mailros, and when the porter opened it, there stood a horse with a tall, fair-haired youth on its back, who carried a spear and was attended by a squire. This youth, who looked much more like a soldier than a novice, craved admittance to the monastery. Much puzzled, the porter sought the Prior, Boisil, the Abbot being absent at the time, and told him of the stranger's request. Boisil, however, showed no astonishment. If the stranger, whoever he was, had a vocation to serve God as a monk, it meant one more recruit to the missionary ranks, one more soldier in the army of God which warred against Satan; so with great gladness of heart he went to greet the goodly youth, and bid him welcome to his new life.

[1] The special piece of hill-land frequented by a particular flock of sheep.

CHAPTER II

MAILROS AND RIPON

WE have already had a glimpse, when reading the life of S. Oswald, of the daily routine of the monks of Iona. The monks of Lindisfarne and Mailros spent their time in exactly the same way, following the same Rule and wearing the same dress.

So we can tell pretty accurately what sort of life Cuthbert led after the gates of the monastery closed behind him. At first doubtless he joined the classes of the "Alumni," or pupils, and learned to read and write. When he had mastered these rudimentary arts he would go on to the study of the Scriptures, especially of the Gospels and the Psalms, and take his part in copying these, letter by letter, on parchment or vellum.

We read that Boisil, the Prior, took a special interest in the new-comer. Indeed the two men, so different in age, soon became great friends, and Cuthbert responded to the care and attention bestowed on him by learning with extraordinary quickness all the tasks that were set him, and becoming in a short time more proficient in his studies than the other novices. This

was partly due to his great physical strength, which enabled him to spend long hours in study without feeling the strain ; but it was also due to his eagerness and religious fervour, for he looked forward with an intense longing to the time when he would be a priest, and would go out like the other monks to preach, and to baptize, and to administer the Holy Communion.

So he considered no labour too severe, no task too hard, if it fitted him for this great end.

He would also share in the manual life of the community, and for this his experience as a shepherd would stand him in good stead. For he would be called upon to plough and sow and reap, to milk cows and tend sheep, to do joiner work, to make his own clothes and the clothes of others, as well as to bake and cook and brew.

Our hero seems to have thrown himself into these divers occupations with all his heart and soul, looking on them as so many tools which he could use to prepare himself for his life work. And I am sure old Prior Boisil must have rejoiced as he saw this favourite pupil of his, who had such a sunny nature, and such an eager, earnest spirit, growing more and more fit, as the years went on, to enter into the solemn vocation which he had chosen.

We do not know when it was that Cuthbert was ordained priest. Perhaps it was at Mailros, but it is supposed that it was at Ripon. For after he had been at Mailros for several years a call came to that com-

munity to send a little body of monks to found a monastery at Ripon in Deira.

As you remember, King Oswy, brother of Oswald, had ruled in Bernicia during Aidan's lifetime, and he had treacherously murdered his cousin Oswin, and obtained the sovereignty of Deira as well. You remember also that he had married Princess Eanfleda, who had been brought up at the court of Kent.

Oswy and Eanfleda had a son named Alcfrid, to whom his father gave great power in the kingdom. Alcfrid was a zealous Christian, and as he had lands and manors of his own in Deira he determined to give part of his possessions to the Church, and help forward its mission by founding a monastery. As he had spent his boyhood at Bamborough, we may be quite sure that he had often walked across the wet sands to Lindisfarne, and that he knew all the monks there.

And now that he was a man, and had this pious project in his mind, it was to one of Aidan's "boys," now the wise and experienced Abbot of Mailros, that he turned for help and guidance. He offered Eata a piece of land at Rhypum or Ripon on the banks of the Ure, and promised him all the assistance he needed in money and material for building.

Eata was now an elderly man, and he might have been excused had he said that he had done his part, for in his youth he had set out from Lindisfarne and founded Mailros—other and younger men must now

take up the work and go from Mailros to found Ripon. But that was not the spirit these old missionary-monks were of.

Glad of this new work which had come unsought to his hand, Eata set forth at the head of a party of monks, among whom was the novice Cuthbert, leaving Prior Boisil to rule Mailros in his absence.

The journey from Mailros to Ripon would not take long to-day, six hours at the most, but to the little company of Celtic missionaries in their white gowns, grey cloaks, and sandals, who set out to traverse the distance on foot, it must have meant a week or more of travel.

The building of the new monastery did not take long, as there was plenty of forest land in the district, and, as we know, all the structures would be merely of wood and wattles. When it was completed it was known as the "Scots Monastery."

In it the office of "hostillar" or guest-master was held by Cuthbert, who, although he was one of the youngest of the party, was so kind and courteous that it seemed to Eata that he was most fitted for the duties which such a post entailed. And in connection with this a very beautiful legend is told.

At that time the country round Ripon was very bleak, and sparsely populated, and one cold winter day, when the ground was white with snow, a poor tired pilgrim knocked at the door and craved admittance.

Cuthbert received him with the most winning kind-

ness, and, seeing that he was half frozen with the icy wind, seated the stranger by the fire, and ran for hot water with which to wash his feet. After he had performed this menial office he found that the poor man's limbs were still numb with cold, so, opening the breast of his tunic, he placed his feet close to his own warm flesh and held them there until they too were warm.

Then Cuthbert laid the table, and invited his guest to seat himself at it and eat the viands which he had placed there, while he went to the kitchen for some fresh, crisp bread which he knew had been put in the oven, and which he expected would now be baked.

What was his astonishment when he returned, a delicious newly-baked loaf in his hand, to find that the stranger had disappeared. He ran to the door and looked out, determined to call him back, but no trace of him was to be seen, not even a footprint, although a shower of snow had just fallen, so that any mark that had been made in it would be clearly visible.

Greatly wondering, the young guest-master ran back to the guest parlour and looked in a little closet that opened out of it. No one was in it, but the tiny room was full of a sweet perfume, and there, lying on the table, were three loaves, still warm, and of unwonted whiteness.

Then Cuthbert bowed his head, for he knew that he had entertained an angel of GOD who had come to give him his blessing—to feed him, not to be fed.

Eata and his monks did not remain long at Ripon. We have already spoken of the controversy between the Roman and Celtic branches of the Church about the keeping of Easter. As long as Bishop Aidan lived this controversy had been in abeyance, that is, no one had cared to stir it up because it was well known that Aidan held to the Celtic use, and he was so much respected and beloved that no one wished to vex him, or to introduce strife into his diocese.

But when he died all was different. One of his own "boys," Wilfrid, had, after he left Lindisfarne, gone to Rome, and had there learned all about the Roman way of doing things, and when he came back he tried by every means in his power to introduce the Roman customs into the Northumbrian Church, and by and by he succeeded.

But at first there was bitterness and controversy, for King Oswy called a great synod at Whitby to discuss the matter, and when it was finally decided that the Northumbrian Church must fall in with the usage of the rest of the Church in England, Colman, Bishop of Lindisfarne, resigned his office rather than agree to such a course, and retired with the greater part of his monks to Iona ; while, on Abbot Eata's refusal to introduce Roman usages at Ripon, Prince Alcfrid sent him and his companions back to Mailros, and handed over the monastery to Wilfrid.

CHAPTER III

"IN JOURNEYINGS OFT"

WHEN Eata and Cuthbert and the rest of their brethren returned to Mailros, they found the life there going quietly on, just as it had been doing when they left it three years before. But changes soon came.

When Bishop Colman went back to Iona, he asked King Oswy to allow the monastery of Lindisfarne to be under the rule of the monks of Mailros. So Eata had now a double charge, for he was Abbot of both houses.

Shortly afterwards, in A.D. 664, a great epidemic, called the yellow plague, broke over the whole of Britain, and, among other districts, raged with great severity in Northumbria. Boisil, the saintly Prior of Mailros, caught it, so did Cuthbert, so did the new Bishop of Lindisfarne, whose name was Tuda. Cuthbert recovered, but the Prior and the Bishop died.

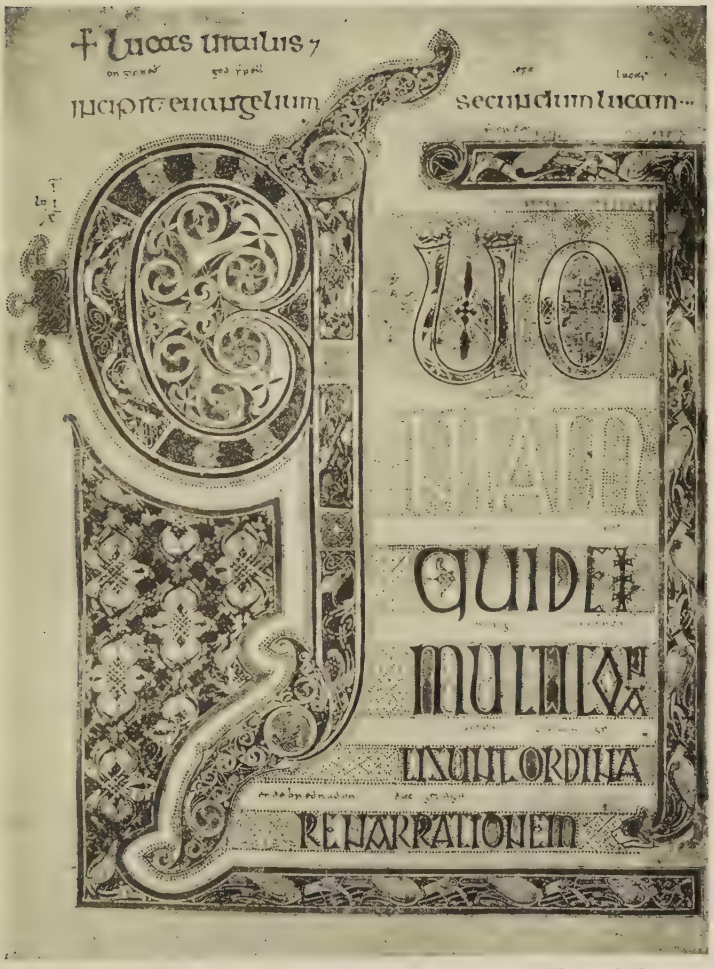
When Boisil knew that his end was near he called to him the pupil whom he had watched over so tenderly, and loved so well, and asked him to open the Gospel of S. John, and to divide it into seven parts. "For," said he, "I have but seven days to

live, and I should like to have one part read to me each day."

Cuthbert did as he was bid, and the old man passed into the valley of the shadow of death with the familiar words ringing in his ears, and with this spiritual son of his, whose life he had done so much to guide and train, close beside him.

We are glad to learn that after Boisil's death Cuthbert was appointed to succeed him ; perhaps the old monk had left a request that he might do so. As far as we know our hero must have been at this time about thirty years of age, so he was in the prime of manhood. He was very young to hold the responsible office which had been laid upon him, but Bede tells us that he acted with great prudence and wisdom, not only giving the novices due instruction out of books, but, what was better, giving them a high ideal of what a priest's life ought to be by the way in which he carried out his everyday duties.

His work in the monastery did not altogether satisfy him, for, like Bishop Aidan, he had the true missionary's spirit. So he used to set out on long expeditions all over the Border country, preaching and teaching wherever he went, and the country-folk who lived far up among the Cheviots and the Lammermoors, and among the dreary and almost inaccessible swamps which at that period covered so much of the Border district, came to look for and to love the visits of the hardy monk, who came tramping along



[Gibson, Hexham.

The Lindisfarne Gospels.

on foot in all weathers, in summer heat and winter snow ; who was content to fare as they fared, and sleep as they slept ; who could speak to them in their rude, uncouth dialect, which most of the people who lived in the valley did not understand ; and who was so wonderfully sympathetic that they found themselves telling him all their troubles as though he had been one of themselves.

No wonder that his words gained an entrance to their hearts, when he spoke to them of the great God in Whom he believed, and in Whom he wished them to believe also.

It has been said of Cuthbert that "he always knew what to say, to whom, when, and how to say it" ; and this was the secret of his missionary success. He gathered the little children round him on the hill-sides in summer, and round the turf fires in the dark, smoky huts in winter, and told them the same simple Bible stories that our little ones are taught to-day.

He tried to kindle the enthusiasm of the young men by telling them about his own shepherd life, and how the higher call had reached him to become a shepherd of souls. And he talked gently and sympathetically to the hard-working, down-trodden men and women, helping them in their everyday troubles, as well as trying to enlighten their minds. "For," said he, "to comfort and advise the weak is equivalent to an act of prayer."

Nor did he confine his labours to the vicinity of

Mailros, but he preached through all the country from the coast of Berwickshire on the east to the Solway on the west.

Many beautiful stories and legends linger round the memory of these years. They show us that Cuthbert, like S. Francis of Assisi, and S. Hugh of Lincoln, had a wonderful sympathy with dumb animals, and exercised a strange influence over them. Perhaps the best known of these stories is that which tells us how he went, on the invitation of the Abbess Ebba, to pay a visit to her monastery at Coldingham. Now it was Cuthbert's austere custom, as it was the custom of many of his Celtic brethren, to say his prayers or recite a certain number of Psalms standing in a pool or bath of cold water, in order that he might be very wide awake and attend to what he was doing.

At Coldingham the sea was near, so Cuthbert, who wanted to spend some hours of the night in prayer, got out of bed when every one else was sleeping—except one monk who followed him and who told the story afterwards—and went straight down into the sea and stood there, with the water up to his arm-pits, singing the praises of God.

When the first streak of dawn was seen in the eastern sky he returned to the sand, and kneeling down, began to say his prayers. "And behold," so the quaint old story goes, "two otters came out of a cave in the precipitous rock, which at that point

overhangs the sea, and licked his half-frozen feet with their tongues, and wiped them with their hair."

On another occasion, when he was on a missionary tour among the Picts of Galloway, and was proceeding in a boat with two of his monks along the Solway Firth, he landed, on S. Stephen's Day, at a little creek at the mouth of the Dee, intending to remain there for a few hours. Scarcely had the boat been made fast when a wild tempest arose, which made it impossible for them to proceed on their journey, and for twelve days they were storm-stayed in the bare and desolate spot, and suffered severely from cold and hunger.

Indeed they were nearly starved, and the hearts of the Prior's two companions sank within them. Their leader never lost courage, however, but encouraged them to trust in the providence of God, "Who," he reminded them, "had pledged Himself never to fail His servants."

By the time that the Eve of the Epiphany came they were all in great straits, and Cuthbert called upon his friends to join with him in praying very earnestly that help might be sent, reminding them how God of old had opened up a way for His people through the Red Sea, and had fed them miraculously in the wilderness. "I believe," he said, "that if our faith fail not, He will not leave us fasting on this day, which He Himself has vouchsafed to illustrate with so great and many marvels of His Majesty."

So the night was spent in prayer, and next morning, at the foot of the rock, the shipwrecked mariners found, lying on the sand, three pieces of dolphin's flesh, cut as if by human hands, and ready to be cooked. Fortified by these, they endured the storm for three days longer, after which it subsided, and they were able to launch their boat.

Years afterwards the people of Nithsdale, who had received the message which the Prior of Mailros had braved such hardships to carry to them, erected a little chapel on the spot where the Saint and his companions had been storm-stayed, and dedicated it to his memory. And we have the name still with us, though it conveys to our minds the idea of a county and town rather than a church : Kirkcudbright, the church of Cuthbert.

At another time the Prior and his monks were shipwrecked on the coast of Fife in a blinding snow-storm, and here again the monks lost heart. "Alas ! Father, what shall we do ?" they cried, "the snow closes the road along the shore, the storm bars our way over the sea."

"*But the way to Heaven lies open*," replied their heroic leader calmly, and bent himself over his oars.

Another story about Cuthbert tells us how he once set out on foot on a long journey, accompanied by one little boy, probably a pupil in the monastic school.

They travelled through a wild and lonely region, where there were few houses of any description where they could lodge. One night they were overtaken by

[Photo, Neurdein.

S. Cuthbert.

the darkness when they were far from any place of shelter, and as they had no provisions with them they were faint with hunger. Pitying his young companion, who was utterly worn out with fatigue, Cuthbert prayed to God, asking Him in some way to send food. Instantly he felt the assurance in his own heart that his prayer was heard, and that his request would be granted.

So he turned to the weary boy at his side, saying cheerfully, "Learn, my son, to have faith and to hope in the Lord, for no one who faithfully serves God can ever perish with hunger."

No sooner had he uttered the words than an eagle flew past, and alighted on the bank of a river near the travellers. Cuthbert told his little companion to follow it, which the boy did, and presently the great bird caught a monstrous fish, which it allowed the little fellow to take from its mouth.

Greatly delighted, the lad ran with his prize to his master, and would have divided it in two, giving one piece to each, but Cuthbert gently rebuked him, telling him to remember the bird which had so generously succoured them by yielding up its own meal, and bidding him cut the fish in half, as he had intended doing, he sent him back to lay one piece at the eagle's feet, after which the two hungry travellers made "a most agreeable feast" of the other.

CHAPTER IV

CUTHBERT THE PRIOR

BUT a change was now coming in Cuthbert's life. For such wide-spreading authority had been given to Abbot Eata, that he felt he could not rule the great community of Lindisfarne alone, and attend to all his other business as well.

So he summoned Cuthbert from Mailros to help him, making him Prior of the island monastery.

Both Eata and Cuthbert seem to have seen the wisdom of yielding to the new decree about the time of keeping Easter, and the fashion of tonsure. Probably they felt that it was a better thing to be at unity with the whole Church, and at peace with their brethren, than to hold out stubbornly for their own views, when, after all, no vital principle was at stake.

But although he himself had yielded to the synod's decree, Cuthbert did not find everything easy when he took up his new duties; for Colman had not taken all the dissenting monks back with him to Iona. A few had remained behind, and they still refused to follow the Roman use.

Of course the new Prior would have been quite

within his rights had he told them that they must either submit to follow the general rule or leave the monastery, but he preferred to win them by patient argument, knowing that it was far better that they should be persuaded in their own minds that the changes which had been made were right, than that they should agree to them against their will.

So every day he met with them, and reasoned with them, and although they were often very rude to him, and taunted him with his own change of opinion, he never allowed himself to show the slightest resentment ; but, when he was pressed beyond endurance, he simply dismissed the monks in the most natural way, and when they all met next morning he was as cheerful and kind and even merry as ever.

And we are glad to know that he at last overcame all the objections of these men, and led them to see that after all they were not giving up any article of their faith, but only conforming to outward observances which differed very little from their own. So gradually the dispute ceased, and there was peace.

In other ways our hero's life at Lindisfarne differed very little from that which he led at Mailros.

Like S. Aidan, he often spent weeks on the mainland, journeying on foot from hamlet to hamlet, over bare moors and bleak hill-sides, teaching the people and winning their hearts, as he had won the hearts of the dwellers on the other side of the Cheviots by his sympathy and love.

So twelve years of busy, active life sped swiftly by. Then a curious craving rose in our hero's heart—a craving which has come to certain men in every age and in every clime. He felt he must go away from everything and every one, and be alone with God.

It was a common thing to do in the early days of the Church, far more common than it is now. So when Cuthbert went to the Abbot and stated his wishes, he was not looked upon as mad, as he might have been to-day.

To oppose him would have seemed to Abbot Eata to be opposing the direct call of God. So, although he doubtless was very sorry to lose his faithful colleague and trusted friend, he simply gave him his blessing, and sent him away.

CHAPTER V

THE HERMIT OF FARNE

THE first place of solitude which Cuthbert chose was quite close to the monastery, being a little islet just a stone's throw from the shore of Lindisfarne. Indeed, it could be reached at low water from the monastery by carefully stepping over the rocks.

But he soon found that it was within too easy reach of the community to afford him the sense of quietness and detachment which his soul longed for.

So he began to look about for another, and more remote spot, to which he might retire.

His choice fell on the island of Farne, the largest of the group of islands of this name, which lay seven miles to the south of Lindisfarne, just opposite the royal fortress of Bamborough. This was the same island to which S. Aidan was wont to retire for solitary prayer. So we may be sure that for S. Cuthbert sacred memories lingered round it.

The island was said to be haunted by demons, so no one ever went there. And we can imagine some of the more timid of the monks trying to persuade

their much loved Prior not to venture his life by living alone on such an unhallowed spot.

But though Cuthbert, like every one else of his time, believed firmly in the malevolent power of evil spirits, he believed still more firmly in the power of God to protect him, so he asked his brethren to row him to the island, and took possession of it in the Name of Jesus Christ, praying that the devils that inhabited it might be cast out—which prayer was granted, for, as Bede quaintly says, "Upon his arrival the wicked spirits withdrew."

Although Cuthbert was something of a mystic, as is shown by this desire of his to withdraw himself entirely from the world in order to enter into closer communion with God, he had a stock of common sense as well, and he knew that it might become impossible for him to live on this rock. There might be no spring from which fresh water could be obtained, he might not be able to supply himself with food! So, instead of making up his mind that he was just going to live there in the face of all obstacles, and thinking that it would be all the more virtuous if he nearly starved, he referred the matter to God's providence, saying to his brethren, "If it shall please the Divine goodness to grant me that I may live in this place by the labour of my hands, I will willingly reside there; but if not I will, by God's permission, very soon return to you."

At the same time he was determined to do his best

[Gibson, Hexham.

Chapel at Farne Island.

to make it possible that he should remain, so he allowed his monks to help him to build a hut, which would at least protect him from the weather, and a little oratory in which he could say his prayers.

When they were preparing the site for these buildings Cuthbert and his brethren dug out the foundations until they reached the bare rock, and, as they did so, they threw up the turf and stones so as to form a circular wall, which on the outside was as high as a man, but on the inside much higher, so that no view of the adjoining island or the surrounding sea could be had by any one standing in the space enclosed, nothing but the blue sky above.

Here our hero caused a hut to be built, the walls of which were of the same material as the encircling wall, while the roof was formed of rough beams, and thatched with straw. This hut was divided into two parts, one of which served as his dwelling-place, the other as his oratory.

Down by the landing-stage he caused another and larger hut to be erected for the accommodation of any of the brethren from Lindisfarne or strangers from the mainland who might care to visit him from time to time.

At first, however, it seemed as if his plans would come to nothing, because of the absence of a good supply of drinking-water ; but, after he had prayed to God to supply this need, he set his monks to dig a hole in the rocky ground, and presently they lit

upon a spring, out of which bubbled a plentiful supply of pure cold water.

The next thing Cuthbert did was to find out if corn or any other cereal would grow on the island. So he asked the brethren to bring him all the necessary implements for tilling the soil, and with his own hands he trenched the hard surface of the ground, gathering out the stones and breaking down the clods until he had a little patch of soil fit for sowing seeds in.

Here he sowed a crop of wheat, and, sustained by food which the monks brought him from time to time, waited anxiously to see the tiny green shoots appear. Alas! day after day and week after week went by and not one single blade found its way through the brown earth. It was evident that the soil and climate of Farne was not suitable for the growth of wheat.

Most men would have been discouraged, but Cuthbert's cheerful hopefulness never failed. He straightway sent for a bag of barley, "for," said he, "it may be the Divine will that such grain should rather grow there."

The barley he sowed at once, although it was not the proper season; and, much to his delight, a plentiful crop grew up, which he looked upon as a token that God had granted His blessing upon his new life, because He had given him the means of supporting himself by his own labour.

When it was apparent that Cuthbert would have the means of sustaining life the brethren left him alone, only going to see him at rare intervals, when they

wished to consult him about spiritual matters or to ask his advice in any great trouble or perplexity. Sometimes he had other visitors, for the news spread through all England that away in the north, on a rock on the coast of Northumbria, lived a very saintly and holy man, "the friend of God, and skilled in the healing of human suffering."

And men of all ranks and conditions, who were in sorrow or distress, or had lived wicked lives and were in great concern about their sins, would travel to Bamborough, and hire a boat, and row themselves quietly over to Farne, going perhaps in the dusk or in the early morning, when no one was about, to open their hearts and lay their sorrows bare before this solitary anchorite, who was said to have such keen insight and warm sympathy with the sorrows and sufferings of sinful men.

And, as has been said, "No man carried back from the sea-beaten island the same burden of suffering, temptation, or remorse which he had taken there—Cuthbert had consolation for all troubles, light for all the sorrowful mysteries of life, counsel for all its perils, a helping hand to all the hopeless, a heart open to all who suffered."

There are numerous stories and legends told about our hero's lonely residence; of these none are more beautiful than those which have come down to us about his friendship with the various birds which came to nest on the island. We read, for instance, about the birds

that came in flocks to feed upon his barley as soon as it appeared above ground.

Instead of throwing stones at them or frightening them roughly away, Cuthbert went to where they were, and said gently, "Why do you touch the grain which you have not sown? Do you think that you have more need of it than I? If, nevertheless, you have obtained leave from God to do this, do what He allows you; but if not, depart, and do no injury to the goods of others."

The birds, so the story runs, were ashamed at this mild reproach, and at once flew away; and, although they returned to the island every year, they never again molested Cuthbert's harvest.

Then there were the two crows, who were accustomed to nest on the island, and who one day settled on the thatch of the "hospitium" or guest house, and, burying their beaks in it, began to tear out the straw to use it for the building of their nest. Cuthbert noticed them, and, going to them, he raised his hands, and bade them depart in the Name of the Lord Jesus. The birds obeyed and left the island; but a few days afterwards, one of them returned and came to the door of the Saint's hut, where, with trailing wings and drooping head, it seemed to ask pardon for its fault. Cuthbert granted it his free forgiveness and gave it leave to return to the island with its companion.

The crow flew joyfully away and shortly afterwards returned with its mate, and for many years afterwards

they remained on Farne and built their nests there, but they never again attempted to touch the Saint's thatch.

Then, of course, every one knows about the gentle eider-ducks that breed nowhere save on the Farne Islands. For centuries they were spoken of as S. Cuthbert's ducks, and their down was called Cuthbert's down, because these beautiful creatures were real friends and companions to S. Cuthbert in his loneliness. This is no legend—it is true.

Probably he may have fed them, and amused himself by watching their habits ; for we know that they were so tame that they would allow him to go among them and stroke them, and that when he spoke to them they obeyed him.

And we love the picture that has been drawn for us of the Saint spending the midnight hours kneeling in prayer in the moonlight on the rocks, with the salt spray dashing up just beneath him, and the gentle eider-ducks clustering round, as if they too would join in his vigil.

Another legend which still connects S. Cuthbert's name with Farne has gathered round certain little pieces of fossil which are only to be found on this part of the Northumbrian coast.

These fossils are called S. Cuthbert's beads, and for long centuries it was believed that, under cover of the darkness, the Saint returned to earth, and, seating himself on one of the rocks where he was wont to

keep vigil in his earthly life, and using another as an anvil, occupied himself in making thousands of these little beads, which he cast into the sea, to be carried hither and thither, and finally washed upon the adjoining beach, to remind the Northumbrians, whenever their eyes fell on them, of their great Patron Saint.

CHAPTER VI

A FATHER IN GOD

DURING the eight years which Cuthbert spent on the island of Farne many changes took place, both in the kingdom of Northumbria and in the government of the Church.

Alcfrid, the prince who had founded Ripon, had died, and his younger brother Egfrid had succeeded to the Northumbrian throne; while a foreign priest named Theodore had been sent from Rome to be Archbishop of Canterbury.

This Theodore was a very interesting man, and he did a very great deal for the Church of England. Although he was sent from Rome he was really of Greek parentage, and he had been born and brought up in the city of Tarsus, the birthplace of S. Paul.

Now before his time England had not been divided up into dioceses in the same way that it is to-day. There were dioceses certainly, but their boundaries were simply the boundaries of the various kingdoms, and the bishops were the chief ministers of these kingdoms.

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For instance, Bishop Aidan at Lindisfarne had been the Bishop of Northumbria, who lived under the protection of King Oswald and King Oswy. Bishop Augustine at Canterbury had been the Bishop of Kent, while the Bishop of London had been the Bishop of the East Saxons, and so on. This was because some kingdoms were Christian and desired to have a bishop; others were heathen, and of course they did not.

But by the time Theodore came, practically the whole of the country was Christian, in name at least, and the wise statesman-like Archbishop saw that it would tend to the unification of the whole country as well as of the whole Church if it were divided into more dioceses, and if the bishops learned to look to Canterbury for orders and advice instead of each looking to his own monarch, who would be apt to bring pressure on the bishop to direct the affairs of the Church according to his own interests.

So Theodore began to go up and down England, taking counsel with the kings and bishops of the various kingdoms, and when he reached Northumbria he held a great synod at a place called Twyford, near the river Alne, at which King Egfrid and all the Northumbrian clergy were present.

Here it was agreed that the vast bishopric of Lindisfarne, over which Eata now ruled, should be divided into two, and that the new diocese should have its episcopal seat at Hexham.

And when the question came to be settled as to who the Bishop of Hexham should be, the answer was unanimous, "Cuthbert, the hermit of Farne."

When the news of his election was carried to Cuthbert in his lonely cell he at first refused to take any notice of it. "He had no desire to be a bishop," he said, and the messengers must just go home and tell King Egfrid that he must find some other priest to take up the responsible office. King Egfrid on his part would take no refusal, and so for some weeks messengers came and went on fruitless errands between the little island and the mainland.

At last the King said he would go himself and beg Cuthbert to accede to the wishes of the people. For every one, country-folk as well as bishops, and monks and nobles as well as the King, desired to have the much-loved hermit back among them as their Father-in-God.

And when King Egfrid proposed to go to Farne a great number of the Northumbrian nobles, as well as a number of monks from Lindisfarne, and a good Bishop named Trumwine, who had been appointed Bishop over the Picts, said that they would accompany him, and add their entreaties to his, to try to induce Cuthbert to change his mind.

So the unwonted sight was seen of a fleet of boats heading over the sea to Farne, and when the hermit came out to greet the visitors, they one and all fell down on their knees before him, and besought him

to leave his lonely habitation, and come back to take his part in guiding the Church, and shepherding the flock of God.

At last Cuthbert consented, sorely against his will, and he was only persuaded to do so when he heard that Bishop Eata had offered to go to Hexham if he, Cuthbert, ruled at Lindisfarne.

As it was now late autumn it was thought better to delay the new Bishop's consecration until the spring, so our hero, much to his delight, was allowed to spend another winter in his dearly loved retreat before he was called upon to take up his new work.

When spring came round, however, he had to bid farewell to his little island with its quiet, sacred memories, and appear in the world once more. For on Easter Sunday, which fell that year on March 26th, he was consecrated by Archbishop Theodore and seven other bishops at York, King Egfrid and his nobles standing by and witnessing the ceremony.[1]

Immediately after his consecration Cuthbert travelled to the north, for it seems as if the great responsibility which had been laid upon his shoulders had awakened the desire within him for human counsel and sympathy.

And it is touching to read that it was not to the monastery at Lindisfarne, over which he had ruled as Prior, that he went to seek for it, but to the humble little monastic settlement of Mailros, where, long years

[1] March 26, A.D. 685.

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King Egfrid offering the See of Hexham to S. Cuthbert.

ago, he had exchanged the dress of a shepherd for that of a novice.

Here he met his old Abbot, Eata, now raised, like himself, to episcopal rank, and for a few weeks they remained there enjoying each other's fellowship, arranging about the interchange of bishoprics, and taking grave and weighty counsel together.

Then they parted, each to his own sphere of labour.

Our hero's life as Bishop of Lindisfarne differed very little from that which he had led as Prior. As has been said, "His whole episcopate (which only lasted two years) seemed to bear the character of a mission indefinitely prolonged." If the simple country-folk, to whom Cuthbert the Prior had been so dear, dreaded that the long years of seclusion which he had spent on Farne, and the great and solemn office which he now held, would have wrought some chilling and mysterious change in him they were mistaken.

For he just took up his old life as though he had never laid it down, trudging about the country dressed in the garb of an ordinary monk, teaching, preaching, confirming, administering the Holy Communion, and tending the sick and dying with his own hands. No wonder that the old people who remembered Bishop Aidan said that his mantle was fallen on this, his latest successor.

When it was known that Bishop Cuthbert was to

pass through a district in order that he might confirm those who had been instructed in the Faith, and who had been baptized, notice was sent to the adjoining hamlets, and some open space in the midst of the thick forests, which then covered a large part of the country, was chosen as a meeting-place to which all who wished to talk to him, or to profit by his ministrations, could resort. Here the Bishop halted on his journey, and a hut was erected for him by means of boughs cut from the surrounding trees. Meanwhile, all the people in the neighbourhood had flocked to the trysting-place to listen to his teaching, to be baptized or confirmed, and mayhap to partake of the Holy Feast. It sounds just like some missionary record which might come to-day from the heart of Africa or India, does it not?

And we need not wonder that it should be so, for, from the days of the Apostle Paul, the news of the Gospel has been spread by much the same methods and the same simple human agencies.

It is very interesting to read about the friends that Bishop Cuthbert had, because in doing so we realize how great a part the royal princesses of England played in furthering the work of CHRIST and His Church in the land.

One of his most intimate friends was the Abbess of Whitby. Not S. Hilda, she had already passed to her rest, but Abbess Elfleda, whom Hilda had brought up from infancy, and who succeeded her.

Abbess Elfleda was a princess of the royal house of Northumbria, being a daughter of King Oswy, and therefore sister to King Egfrid.

She had been consecrated to the service of GOD from the time she was a few months old, as her father had vowed a vow, that, if he could vanquish the ancient enemy of his race, the aged Penda of Mercia, he would give this baby-girl to S. Hilda to be brought up to lead what was then regarded as the only religious life. His desire was granted, Penda was slain, and in fulfilment of his vow the infant princess was taken to Whitby, where she was tenderly cared for by the saintly Abbess.

Elfleda never regretted the choice her father had made for her. The life of a woman, especially one of royal birth, who lived in what was known as "the world" in those days was none too safe or happy, and she was quite content with her life as a nun. She grew into a good, far-seeing woman, and although she was called on to take up the responsible position of Abbess when she was only twenty-one, she ruled her community with prudence and wisdom.

We find her taking counsel with Cuthbert at various times, especially when she was in deep anxiety about her brother Egfrid, whose kingdom seemed to be in danger through a threatened invasion of the Picts.

Then there was the Abbess Ebba of Coldingham, Elfleda's aunt, of whom we heard when we were reading the life of S. Aidan, and at whose monastery

Cuthbert was staying when the otters licked his feet after he had been in the sea.

Also Abbess Verca of Tynemouth, whose monastery stood high up on a cliff at the mouth of the Tyne, just as Coldingham and Whitby stood, perched on cliffs overlooking the sea.

Shortly before his death Cuthbert paid a visit to this lady, making her monastery his head-quarters while he was preaching in the neighbourhood, and, when he was bidding her farewell, she, knowing by some mysterious foresight that she would not see the Bishop again, gave him a large sheet of purest linen, woven probably by her own hands, which she charged him to keep "against his burying."

Another friend was the saintly Etheldreda, foundress and abbess of the monastery and minster of Ely, now the cathedral church of the Fens.

Etheldreda had a curious life-story, which there is not space to dwell on here. An East Anglian princess and a distant cousin of S. Hilda, she had wished from her girlhood to live a distinctly religious life. But fate, in the person of her father, willed it otherwise, and she was married twice — first to Tonbert, prince of the Fens, who gave her the Isle of Ely as her dowry, and after his death to Egfrid, King of Northumbria.

As Queen of that northern kingdom she became acquainted with Bishop Cuthbert, when he was Prior of Lindisfarne, and from the first they were greatly

[Gibson, Hexham.

S. Cuthbert's Vestments, Durham.

drawn to each other. We do not know what side our hero took in the dissentions between the Queen and her husband, for Etheldreda pursued a course of action which seems to us wrong and mistaken. Although she took the marriage vows she had no intention of keeping them, for she felt they had been forced upon her, and she was no real companion to her husband.

So after a time he divorced her and married again, and she was at liberty to retire to her island in the Fens, and build her church, and rule her monastery, and live the life for which she had always longed.

And we find her giving of her abundance, for she was very rich, to the monastery of Lindisfarne, and also embroidering a stole and maniple for the Bishop, which she sent to him, asking him to wear them when he celebrated the Holy Eucharist, and, wearing them, to remember her in his prayers.

But if Cuthbert knew and sympathized with Etheldreda in her troubles and uncertainties, he also proved a staunch friend to her successor, Queen Ermenburga, whom Egfrid married as his second wife.

As I have said, a time came when Northumbria was in great danger by reason of the Picts who were threatening to invade the land. Egfrid and his army marched northward to repulse them, and, penetrating beyond the Tay, burned two of their forts. This befell two months after Cuthbert had been made Bishop.

Although the tidings that came from the army were good, our hero had a premonition that the King would not return, and with his usual sympathy for any one, rich or poor, who was in trouble, he hastened to Carlisle, whither the Queen had gone to spend the time of anxious waiting with her sister, who was Abbess of a monastery there.

Proud of their ancient city, and proud also that the Bishop of Lindisfarne, the fame of whose saintly and self-denying life had spread all over England, should come to visit it, the "reeve," or provost, whose name was Paga, and many of the leading citizens came to meet Cuthbert, and escorted him round the walls, pointing out various bits of Roman remains, for Carlisle had been a Roman settlement.

The little company had paused before a fountain which had been erected by the invaders, and were examining the beautiful carving on the stones, when Cuthbert suddenly bent down till his head almost touched the ground, and Paga and his fellow-townsmen could not help seeing that his thoughts were far away.

Then he straightened himself, and raised his eyes to the blue sky, saying very softly and sadly, "Perhaps at this very moment the hazard of the battle is over."

Greatly astonished, his comrades asked him what he meant, and how he could possibly know what was happening to the King and his army who were

nearly two hundred miles away. The good Bishop could not tell them all he feared, all indeed that God had made known to him, but he told them a little, asking them if they had not noticed how troubled the air had grown, and how he feared this signified some special judgement of the Almighty.

But when they had shown him all that there was to see, and had left him alone, he hastened to the Queen and bade her have her coffers packed and horses in readiness so that she could start at dawn on the following Monday morning, and seek the refuge of the royal fortress of Bamborough without delay.

He did not tell her to set out on the morrow, which was Sunday, but on Monday morning, for in those days the Church laid down strict laws about the keeping of the day of rest. He promised to join her at Bamborough, and it was well that he did so, for a few days later a fugitive from her husband's army arrived in the royal city with the woeful tidings that Cuthbert's intuition had been a true one, and that her husband was slain, pierced to the heart by a Pictish sword.

The poor widowed Queen was crushed and broken-hearted by the blow, and we may be sure that it was to the strong yet tender-hearted Bishop that she turned in her distress.

When we read these stories we realize what a many-sided man Cuthbert was, and how wide and all-embracing were his sympathies.

And there is yet another story, perhaps the most beautiful of all, which shows us how the hardy seafaring folk of his diocese looked upon this great Bishop, who in his lifetime knew as much about the dangers of the sea and the management of boats as they did, and whom, after his death, they took for their Patron Saint.

As late as the twelfth century it was told with awestruck looks and bated breath in Northumbria, that a boatful of sailors, caught in a sudden storm near that rocky coast, and with no hope of rescue, saw, as their frail craft was about to be engulfed by the waves, the holy Bishop Cuthbert appear among them with his mitre on his head and his bishop's crook in his hand, which he used "sometimes as a helm, sometimes as an oar, sometimes as a grappling iron" till he brought them to a place of safety.

CHAPTER VII

THE WORK LAID DOWN

WHEN Cuthbert had held the office of bishop for almost two years his health began to fail, and, with the strange power of foreseeing the future which he seemed to possess, he knew at once that the end of his life was approaching. Wishing to keep one more of the great festivals with his brethren he spent Christmas at Lindisfarne along with the Prior, whose name was Herefrid, and his monks. Then, when the festival was over, he intimated his intention of retiring to his lonely abode on Farne, there to await the end. Finding that their entreaties that he should remain among them were of no avail, the monks accompanied him to the landing-stage, and some of their number prepared to row him across to the little island.

"When may we look for thy return, my Lord Bishop?" asked one of the monks, hoping against hope that the Bishop might relent, and promise to come back once more among them.

"When you shall bring my body hither," replied Cuthbert calmly, as he stepped into the boat.

Then the monks knew that this was a final parting, and like the people of Ephesus, when S. Paul bade them a last farewell, they "wept sore."

During the next six weeks, however, little parties of them used to sail over to Farne and visit the Bishop, for they loved him so much that they could not bear to think of him being there alone, day after day, if he were feeling weak and ill.

One quaint story is told of how a little company of monks arrived one day, and how, after having conferred with the Bishop through the tiny window of his hut, and listened to his spiritual admonitions, they said good-bye, and prepared to depart. But he, ever mindful of the comfort of others, bade them go down to the guest house by the shore, and cook a goose, which they would find hanging on the wall, which would serve as a meal before they sailed. The monks went to the guest house, but they did not eat Cuthbert's goose. They ate instead their own provisions which they had brought with them.

Before they were finished a storm arose, which was so violent that they could not leave the island, and for a whole week they were storm-stayed. For six of these days the Bishop remained within his cell, wrapt, or apparently wrapt, in prayer and meditation. On the seventh he took pity on the monks, now thoroughly tired of their enforced idleness, and went down to visit them in the guest house. There he found the goose still hanging on the

wall. For some reason or other the monks, who must have brought a large stock of provisions with them, had not cooked it.

"What marvel if the sea does not suffer you to depart, if you are so disobedient," said the Bishop whimsically. "Put the goose at once into the cauldron, cook it, and eat it. Then the sea will be at rest, and you may return home."

The monks cooked the goose, the sea fell, and the monks arrived back at Lindisfarne in safety.

But we read no more tales of this kind, for the shadows were deepening round the little cell.

The story of how this much-loved Bishop died was told in very simple yet impressive words to the Venerable Bede by Prior Herefrid, who was with Cuthbert at the end. Bede wrote it all down as it was related to him, so we may be certain that it is true.

Herefrid told how he went to the island, accompanied by one or two of his monks, on February 24, A.D. 687, and stayed in the little guest house three days. On the morning of the third day, Wednesday, February 27th, he went to the Bishop's cell, as was his custom, to ask his blessing and to say good-bye. Everything was quiet when he reached the hut, and when he knocked on the wall the Bishop came to the window, but did not speak.

"What is the matter, my Lord Bishop?" inquired the Prior anxiously. "Hath illness fallen on thee during the night?"

The Bishop replied that it had, and at once began to give instructions as to his burial, bidding the Prior go home in the meantime, but instructing him to return as soon as God had taken his (Cuthbert's) soul ; for apparently he wished to be alone when he died.

The Prior was then to lift the turf at the north side of the oratory, and there he would find a stone coffin, which Cuthbert said had been given him by a former abbot of Lindisfarne. In this his body was to be placed, after being wrapped in the fine linen sheet which he had received from Abbess Verca, and the coffin was to be buried on the south of the oratory, at the foot of a cross which Cuthbert had reared with his own hands.

The worthy Prior was greatly distressed as he listened to those directions, and begged leave to remain on Farne, in order to be near the sick man. But Cuthbert wished to be left alone, and once more bade him return to his monastery.

"But when may I come back?" asked the poor Prior, sadly divided in his own mind between obedience and what seemed to him duty and common sense.

"When God shall please, and He shall show you," was the Bishop's answer, and with that the Prior had to be content.

He went home as he had been bidden, and, feeling that if he could not watch by his superior he could at least pray for him, he gathered all his monks together, and ordered continual intercession to be made, not

for his recovery, that seemed to him impossible, but that grace might be given to him in the hour when, in the beautiful words in which death was spoken of in those days, he "was to depart to GOD."

Naturally Herefrid was very anxious to go back to Farne next day, but in the providence of GOD this was not permitted, for a violent storm arose, and for five days it was impossible to set out to sea. On the sixth the tempest abated, however, and the Prior was rowed across to the little island.

To his surprise he found Cuthbert in the guest house, lying on a bed, greatly exhausted. For, as his illness increased, a craving for human sympathy had arisen in the sick man's heart, and he had crawled down to the guest house, so that the brethren might find him as soon as any of them arrived.

As he was now too weak to rise the Prior was filled with wonder that he had not perished for want of food: "And how, my Lord Bishop, could you live thus?" he inquired. "How have you remained here without taking food for so long a time?"

As an answer Cuthbert lifted the covering of the bed, and showed him five onions, one of which Herefrid tells us was "a little eaten, less, however, than half of it."

"This hath been my food during these days," said the dying man, "for whenever my mouth burned with intolerable dryness or thirst by tasting these I refreshed and recruited myself."

It was impossible, of course, that he could now be left alone. Even he himself felt that. So kindly monks skilled in nursing were summoned from Lindisfarne, and during the few weeks of life that still remained loving hands ministered to him.

He was carried back to his cell, which was a great comfort to him, for, as we have seen, it opened into the little oratory where he was wont to pray, and into which, even now, he sometimes could be taken.

Meantime, Herefrid had had occasion to visit Lindisfarne, and had told the brethren there of the Bishop's desire to be buried on Farne, adding that he would have liked the body to be brought home and laid to rest in their midst. All the monks agreed with him, and asked him to entreat the Bishop to allow this to be done.

So when Herefrid returned to Farne he gently laid the brethren's request before the dying man, telling him how the whole community loved and reverenced him, and begging him to allow them to lay his body to rest in the well-known church where he had so often worshipped along with them.

At first Cuthbert hesitated. "It was my wish," he said, "to rest in the body here where I have fought my little wrestling (such as it was) for the LORD, and where I desire to finish my course, and whence I hope to be raised up by the merciful Judge to a crown of glory."

In his unselfish care for them he also explained that

he thought it would be better if he were not buried in the abbey church, because he felt that he would probably be spoken of, in the future, as a holy person—that is, a Saint; and that his place of sepulchre would be looked on as a place of sanctuary, to which criminals in danger of their life might flee, in order to escape from their pursuers. And, if this were so, he knew that it would bring trouble and care upon the community.

But when the Prior assured him that no trouble or care would be thought too much if only the monks could feel that his body rested among them, he acceded to the request, stipulating only that if ever they had to fly from Lindisfarne in consequence of a heathen invasion they would dig up his bones, and carry them away with them, in order that they might rest among Christian people.

On the day preceding his death this great and good Bishop, a true Father-in-God till the last, in spite of his weakness, gathered Herefrid and the monks who were with him round him in the oratory, where he was reclining in a corner opposite the altar, and gave them his last words, bidding them "keep peace one with another and heavenly charity"; and exhorting them as a community not to hold aloof from their fellow-Christians, and to "despise not the household of the Faith who come to you seeking hospitality, but be careful to receive them, to entertain them, and to send them away with friendly kindness. And, above all," he

added solemnly, "do not think that you are better than other followers of the same faith and conversation."

After this he lay quietly and tranquilly till the early morning hour when it was the custom of the monks to say Matins. Then, after having received the Holy Communion in silence, for he had lost the power of speech, he held up his hands as if in thanksgiving, and quietly and gently passed to his rest.

Quickly one of the brethren ran with two lighted torches to the highest part of the island, where to-day the great lighthouse flashes its beams over the stormy waters, and waved them to and fro as a sign to the monks in the mother-house at Lindisfarne that all was over. A watcher had been stationed near the monastery while the other monks sang their Office, and with swelling heart he left his post and hurried into the church to whisper the sad tidings to the kneeling figures there.

Next morning, in the sunlight, a boat was launched at the little landing-stage at Farne and headed towards Lindisfarne, driven by rowers who bent sadly over their oars. In it sat Herefrid, and beside him lay the stone coffin which contained all that was mortal of Northumbria's greatest Saint.

When the boat reached the larger island it was met by a crowd of people, who had doubtless come from the mainland, and by the whole body of monks and little singing-boys, chanting the penitential Psalms.

Solemnly the coffin was borne to the church, at the

[Gibson, Hexham.

S. Cuthbert's Pectoral Cross.

entrance to which a halt was made, while the body of the dead Bishop was vested in priest's vestments as befitted his sacred office. Then the coffin was once more closed, and carried to the resting-place which had been hastily prepared for it on the right side of the altar.

Eleven years afterwards the body was placed in a specially prepared wooden coffin, which was enclosed in a magnificent shrine, and doubtless the monks who were then alive thought that S. Cuthbert's dust would rest there always, and that his shrine would be for the glory of their island church throughout the coming ages.

CHAPTER VIII

FINDING A PLACE OF SEPULCHRE

BUT this was not to be, for after many wanderings the bones of our hero, along with the relics of the two other Saints whose names are written in this book, were destined to find a more glorious place of sepulchre.

And the story of how they came to do so is as curious and interesting as any tale of romance.

Every one knows how, in the ninth century, the "Northmen," the fierce Danish Vikings, swooped down upon our eastern shores, coming at first to plunder, afterwards to remain.

During the first invasions the monasteries and abbeys were passed over, but when the barbarous sea-rovers descended on our coasts for the second time they came to know that most of the precious things in the country, gold and silver and jewels, were stored in these sacred places, because the Christians were wont to give of their most costly possessions to adorn the house of their GOD. So they turned their attention specially to such places, plundering, looting, and burning in their mad fury and lust of gain, and

murdering with relentless cruelty any monks or nuns, and there were hundreds of such, who tried to protect their homes and defend their sanctuaries.

When the monks of Lindisfarne heard of the terrible things that had happened on the mainland, especially in the Fen district where the magnificent monasteries and abbey churches of Ely, Crowland, and Peterborough had been destroyed, they were very much alarmed. And when their Bishop, whose name was Eardulph, learned that the Danes were marching northward, and had wrought much damage at York, he thought it safer for himself and his monks to leave their island home and take refuge on the mainland, for he knew that the monastery and abbey would certainly be destroyed, and that if any one were found on Lindisfarne he would not escape alive.

So he gave orders that all the valuable things—altar vessels, vestments, and manuscripts—which the little community possessed should be hurriedly gathered together, and carried with them on their flight.

And remembering the great Bishop Cuthbert's dying injunction, which had doubtless been handed down from abbot to abbot, and reckoning that the bones of the founders of the abbey were among the most precious treasures that the community possessed, Abbot Eardulph caused Cuthbert's shrine to be opened, and his coffin taken out. Then, because one

such burden was quite enough to carry, he had King Oswald's skull taken from its resting-place, and the remainder of Aidan's bones (you remember part of them had already been carried to Iona), and some bones which had belonged to Bishop Eata and two other bishops, and placed them in a linen sack in Cuthbert's coffin. Having done this, and having placed the coffin in an outer chest of wood which they wrapped in a bullock's hide, which was nailed down so as to protect the chest as far as might be from the weather, the sorrowful company of monks said a last farewell to their loved abode and set out over the wet sands to the mainland, a company of homeless wanderers, the coffin in their midst.

For seven years they journeyed, like the children of Israel, seeking a place of rest and finding none. Up and down the valley of the Tyne they wandered, and over by Rede Swire. For some reason or other, which after a lapse of a thousand years we cannot even guess at, they found there no foothold where they might take possession and once more strike their roots.

Then they seemed to have turned their thoughts to Ireland, the country from which at first the founder of their order had come, and they crossed to the west of England, to Lancashire, and took ship at the mouth of the river Derwent. But a violent storm arose, and, the ship becoming unmanageable, they had to return to land. It was during this experience, when the waves were washing over the vessel,

that one of the most cherished possessions of the community, a copy of the Gospels written in Anglo-Saxon, and beautifully illustrated, was washed overboard and nearly lost.

It was picked up on the beach a few days afterwards, however, not very much the worse for its immersion. This book is known as the "Durham Book," and is said to have been that from which S. Cuthbert read to Prior Boisil when the latter was dying. It has happily been preserved till the present day, and is now in the British Museum.

The monks thus thwarted in their design of taking refuge in Ireland, went into Scotland to Witherne[1] in Galloway. From there they travelled southward to Westmoreland, then into Teesdale, then into the Yorkshire wolds.

At last they found rest, for the time at least, at Cuncachester, or, as we now call it, Chester-le-Street. They seem to have founded a monastery and built a church, for for a hundred and thirteen years the community had its head-quarters here, and the Bishop, instead of bearing the title of Bishop of Lindisfarne, was known as the Bishop of Bernicia. Then once more the Danes threatened to destroy them, and once more they lifted their sacred burden and went on.

At this time the community was presided over by a Bishop named Aldhun, and he led his flock to Ripon in the first place, where they abode four months, the

[1] Whithorn.

precious relics resting, doubtless, in the Minster there. Then he seems to have made up his mind to return to Lindisfarne, the ancient home of the Order, now lying wasted and defaced. But God ordered it otherwise, and the legend which tells how S. Cuthbert's bones came to rest at Durham is very quaint and curious.

It is said that as the monks were slowly wending their way northwards to the coast, feeling very anxious and downcast no doubt, the wheels of the rude handcart on which the coffin of the Saint rested seemed to stick to the ground, and no amount of force on their part could move it.

Sorely perplexed, and at their wits end what to do, the poor men knelt down and prayed that some sign might be granted whereby they might know what course to pursue. Shortly afterwards it was revealed to one of them by S. Cuthbert himself that his bones were destined to be taken to a place called Dunholme, and that that would be their final resting-place. But even this information did not throw very much light on their path, for no one knew where Dunholme was, much less the way that led to it.

Just then two milkmaids passed, and one of them, who seemed to have lost her cow, shouted to the other, asking if she had seen it.

"It is in Dunholme," was the reply, and as the girl hastened off to look for the lost animal, the delighted monks, overjoyed to think that their travels

were nearly over, pushed forward the cart (which no longer stuck to the ground) and followed her.

Presently they came to an open space shaped like a horseshoe, which stood in the midst of wooded country, high up above a river, almost like a cliff rising from the sea. Finding that this was Dunholme they laid down their burden with light and thankful hearts, feeling that they had reached their journey's end.

And so indeed they had, for S. Cuthbert's bones and those relics which we have mentioned which belonged to his brother Saints have rested on that spot ever since, hallowing it by sacred memories, and having an enduring memorial which shall stand through the ages, in the great and magnificent cathedral church of Durham, which was built to provide a place of sepulchre for them.

The very first thing that Bishop Aldhun did was to erect a tiny church of wands and branches, which did not afford much protection perhaps, but which served as a temporary shelter for the hide-bound coffin, and in which the daily service of praise and thanksgiving could be rendered.

We hope, for the monks' sake, that it was summer time, for no sooner was the frail structure completed than they began to build a little church of stone, which at least was watertight ; and we have it on record that they never thought of providing huts for themselves until this too was finished.

Then in due time the cells of their little monastery arose, clustering round the rude stone church, and for a season, at least, we should have expected them to be content.

But no! For in their journeyings up and down the country they had seen really beautiful churches, notably at Ripon, and feeling sure, from the miraculous way in which they had been guided, that now at last they had found a sure resting-place, they determined that they too would build a sanctuary which they could feel was worthy of the solemn worship that would be offered within its walls, and be a fitting place of burial for their honoured Saint.

We must remember what this resolve entailed. These men were strangers in the district. They had no one to help them, or to dower them with gifts. So if they persevered in their purpose it was more than probable that they would have to quarry the stones, hew them, and lift them into position with their own hands.

Still they were not daunted. The builders of these days built for GOD, and of the strength and energy which He had given them they offered willingly. But we rejoice to think that the little band of heroic monks perched upon their tiny tableland above the Wear were not left to labour alone.

For no sooner did the people of the district realize that the bones of the great Hero-Saint of their country were to find a permanent resting-place at Dunholme,

than they came and begged to be allowed to do their part in raising the memorial church.

The monks accepted their help gladly. So, under the leadership of the Earl of Northumbria, who put himself at their head, the whole of the inhabitants of the country from the Coquet to the Tees left their homes—men, women, and even the little children—and, dragging their rude hand-wagons with them, flocked to Dunholme, and, encamping in the meadows across the Wear, remained there until the work was done.

It is very beautiful to read of the building of this "white church," as the new cathedral was called, for of course it was a cathedral, as Bishop Aldhun had his "stool" there. For every one took part in it, from the strong men who quarried and hewed the stones, and the women who harnessed themselves in bands to the laden carts and dragged them up the steep hill, and the monks who laid the stones in their places, down to the little children, who, maybe, only carried their fathers' and their mothers' dinners to them.

Every one worked so hard and was so much in earnest that in less than three years the white church was finished; and we may be sure that on the day of its consecration, when the people crowded into it to join in the prayers and praises, they felt that from henceforth it would indeed be to them their mother church.

But great and splendid as the white church of

Dunholme was, it is not the wonderful cathedral which crowns the eminence to-day, which, when we enter it, awes us by its solemn strength and grandeur.

This was begun in A.D. 1093 by Bishop William de S. Carileph, who was Bishop of Durham just a hundred years after Bishop Aldhun. He had taken part in the rebellion against William Rufus, and had in consequence been obliged to leave his see and take refuge in Normandy for three years. Here he grew accustomed to very large and magnificent churches, and on his return to Durham he began the present cathedral, which took in all some three hundred years to build.

Between the time that the white church was pulled down and the time that the choir of the new cathedral was sufficiently advanced to admit of its being placed there, S. Cuthbert's coffin rested in a temporary tomb of stone and marble in the cloister garth, but in A.D. 1104 it was carried into the partly completed church and placed in a magnificent shrine, formed of costly green marble, covered with gold and enamel, and hung with jewels.

This shrine stood on a stone platform behind the high altar, and was generally concealed by a covering. On great festivals, however, this covering was raised by means of a rope, from which hung numerous silver bells, and the shrine was exposed to view in all its magnificence.

To-day the shrine has vanished, destroyed, as were

[Gibson, Hexham.

S. Cuthbert's Shrine, Durham.

so many beautiful and costly things, at the Reformation; but although at that time the coffin was removed and the bones taken out of it, they were happily not thrown away as rubbish as so many other relics of our English saints have been; but on an order coming from London from King Henry VIII they were replaced in the coffin and buried "under the place where the shrine was exalted," that is, under the platform.

But as we stand on this bare, ugly platform to-day, which at first sight seems so out of place in its surroundings, for we find it in a beautiful chapel known as the chapel of the Nine Altars; and look down at the dark slab of marble at our feet, beneath which the bones of S. Cuthbert and his fellows lie, then up at the vaulted roof over our heads, and think of the stately, solemn beauty of the building in which we find ourselves, and of the years that were spent in erecting it, and the labour and skill and love and money that have gone to its adorning, we realize what a wonderful memorial, far more costly than any gilded shrine, has been erected to this old Northumbrian Saint. For as long as Durham Cathedral remains the memory of S. Cuthbert and his life-work, aye, and the memory of the life-work of S. Aidan and of S. Oswald also, will never pass from the minds of men.

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